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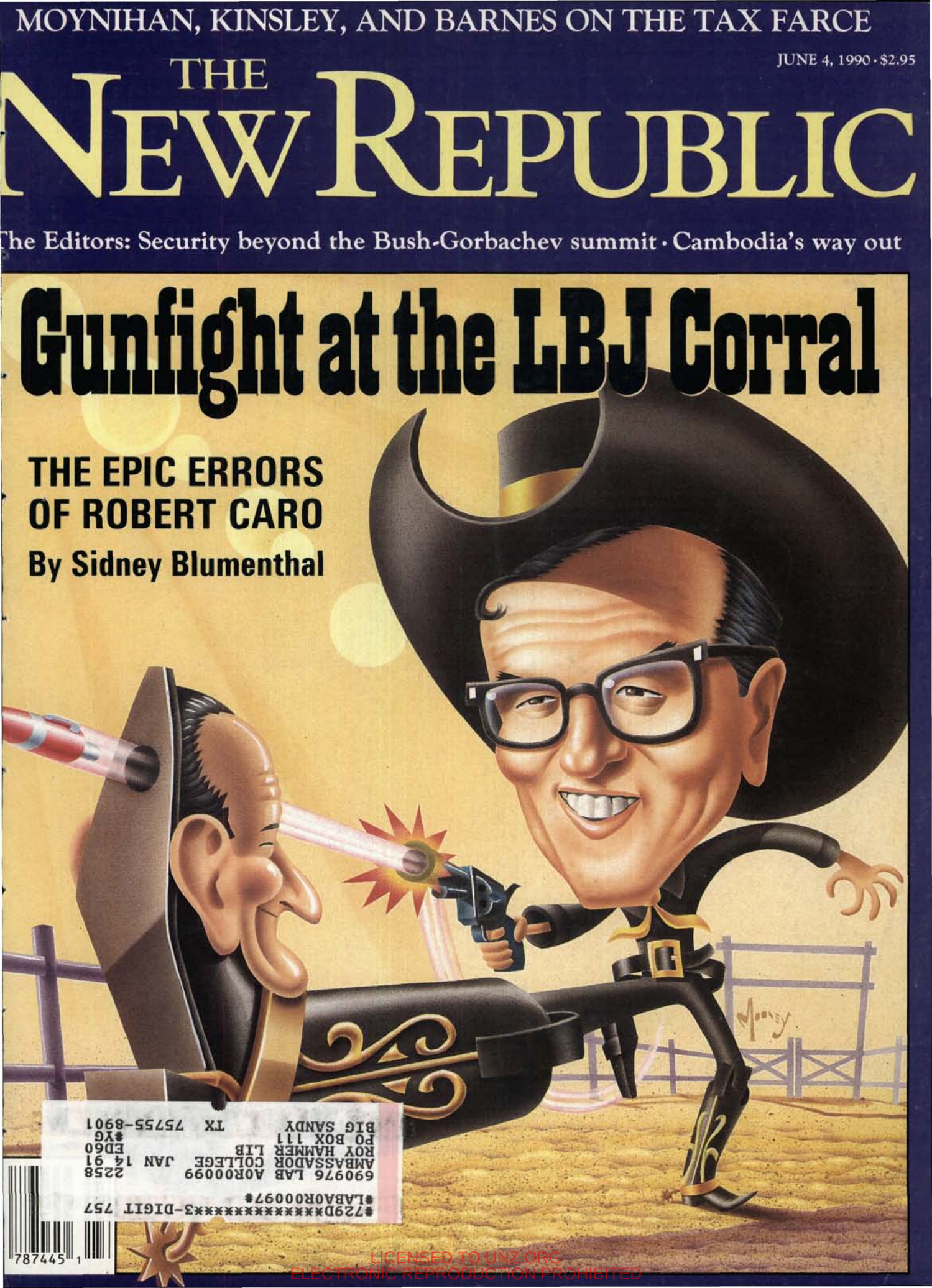
By Sidney Blumenthal



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THE NEW REPUBLIC, Vol. 202, Number 23, Issue 3,933, June 4, 1990. (Printed in the U.S. on May 16, 1990.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated Jan. 8 & 15, July 9 & 16, July 30 & Aug. 6, Aug. 20 & 27, and Sept. 10 & 17, 1990) at 1220 19th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone (202) 331-7494. Leadership Network advertising (212) 684-5500. Yearly subscriptions, $59.97; foreign, $89.97; Canada, $74.97. Back issues, $3.50 (includes postage & handling). ©1990 by The New Republic, Inc. (ISSN 0028-6583). Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. Available on microfilm from University Microfilms Intnl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and Bell & Howell, Old Mansfield Road, Wooster, OH 44691. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscribers: Please send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to Subscription Service Dept., The New Republic, P.O. Box 56515, Boulder, CO 80322. For subscription problems call 800-274-6686.

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FROM WASHINGTON

Do the wrong thing

"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known."

Of course the noble, statesmanlike thing would be for the Democrats to sign on to a budget deal with the Bush administration, restoring fiscal sanity while fudging the blame. And the Democratic Party is cursed with statesmen, such as House Speaker Tom Foley and Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell. There will soon be a drumbeat of editorials urging them to do the right thing and not be "obstructionist." But if any political organization in history was relieved of the responsibility to be statesmanlike on any issue, it is the Democratic Party on the subject of taxes.

The budget negotiation is more like thumb wrestling than arm wrestling. The two sides aren't really pushing in opposite directions; they both want to end up in roughly the same place. But whoever goes first loses. When White House chief of staff John Sununu said that Democrats could propose a tax increase but President Bush would reject it, this produced cries of "trap!" But the real trap came next: Bush's allegedly reassuring phone call to Foley that all options would be considered.

There is simply no way that Democrats won't get stuck with most of the blame if a budget summit produces a serious tax increase. No form of words by Bush, standing in a bipartisan cluster of politicians and blathering about shared responsibility, can truly sterilize the issue. Republican spin controllers will go to work; some Republican representatives and senators will vote against the deal. House Minority Whip Newt Gingrich is spinning already: "I don't think there's any question in this country which party is addicted to taxes and which party is reluctantly willing to negotiate." And spin is hardly necessary. Polls show that voters are already reconciling themselves to higher taxes; but any "bipartisan" deal will still leave the impression that Republicans raise taxes *less*.

The Bush administration has not yet shown the slightest evidence of true good faith in this matter. Budget director Richard Darman preposterously insists that he only recently discovered the gaping hole in the 1991 budget. He is shocked, shocked to learn that his projections of four months ago may be off by $40 or $50 billion (not counting the cost of the S&L bailout). Sununu says that the sudden crisis is caused by "the logjam in . . . Congress"—demonstrated by the fact that the House passed a budget with what he considers to be an inadequate majority.

On a Sunday talk show, Darman actually had the gall to talk about "good faith" while noting—in the same breath, and with that self-satisfied twinkle in his eye—that if nobody at the negotiating table would bring up taxes himself, others might mention recent tax increase proposals already made by Senator Fritz Hollings and Representative Dan Rostenkowski. "Good faith," then, apparently requires the Democrats to put tax increases on the table, and for the Republicans to accept them in a bipartisan spirit.

The administration's main bit of bad faith is Bush's refusal—reciting the mantra of "no preconditions"—to say how *he* would reduce the deficit by another $50 billion or so. His evasiveness about serious spending cuts is as adamant as his evasiveness about taxes. The administration's 1991 budget, for example—the one everyone concedes is now inadequate—supposes large savings in farm price supports. How? No details, but a promise to "work with Congress."

Should we prune Social Security benefits? Sununu: "Well, I think you ought to talk to all the participants as to what 'no preconditions' on that issue means to them." Even Senator Phil Gramm, Mr. Anti-Big-Government himself, says regarding Medicare, Food Stamps, etc.: "We ought to take the president's entitlement-saving total, and then let Congress decide how they want to save the money."

This is the moment Democrats have been waiting for since 1980. Republicans have been winning elections by helping voters to evade the question of how much government they want and how they intend to pay for it. Democrats have been losing elections by pointing this out. The real moment of truth comes next October, just before Election Day, when the Gramm-Rudman automatic chopper switches on if a satisfactory deal can't be made. There had been loose talk among Republicans about letting the automatic cuts take effect. But now it looks as though the cuts might be 20 percent or more in the parts of the government the law applies to.

The loose talk these days is once again of a line-item veto: letting the president slash spending more or less unilaterally. As proposed before in this space, Congress should give Bush some kind of informal line-item veto because that bluff is just as hollow as the automatic-chopper bluff. There is no way to put the deficit on the downward path Bush claimed it already was on in his State of the Union address last January without either a hefty tax increase or spending cuts that would be just as painful.

That's not to say that all current spending is worthwhile. It's only to say that Republicans have shown scarcely more courage than Democrats about taking on popular but unnecessary spending. Meanwhile they have shown considerably less courage about paying for it. Pressed in recent days about what, specifically, they would cut to avoid raising taxes, they offer up photo exhibits by Robert Mapplethorpe. So there's a few thousand bucks. Meanwhile, President Bush is off to Mars, with easy payments spread over half a century.

As many have said, the Democrats are torn between being a party of opposition and a party of shared leadership. Somehow, they suffer the disadvantages of both roles. On the question of taxes, though, there should be no ambiguity. As Republicans delight in observing, this issue has been put repeatedly to the test, and the Democrats have lost. They are the opposition. And they are under no obligation to lighten the burden of a Republican leadership that has made raising taxes poisonous with the voters and that now sees no other way out.

It's not only President Bush and his Republican colleagues who need to be taught a lesson. It's the citizenry as well. A taste of the Gramm-Rudman across-the-board cuts might be a wonderful civics lesson. It would stifle that tedious joke—told by price-supported farmers, Medicare-enriched doctors, and so on—about how the biggest lie in the English language is, "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help you." In the case of both Bush and the voters, reluctant acquiescence to a tax increase is not good enough. They've got to be begging for it.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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CORRESPONDENCE

Misleading terms

To the editors:

To bolster his argument that congressional elections have recently become a sham ("Twelve Is Enough," May 14), Hendrik Hertzberg presents three impressive statistics: (1) 98.3 percent of incumbents who sought re-election were re-elected in 1988; (2) "this number has remained in the 90s since 1974"; and (3) "the average incumbent is getting 73.5 percent" of the vote. Although these statistics are accurate, they are somewhat misleading. High rates of incumbent re-election to the House have existed for more than twice as long as statistic No. 2 indicates. Since 1950 the percentage of incumbents who sought re-election and were re-elected dipped below 90 (and not by much) on only four occasions.

Hertzberg also never discusses the obvious explanation for why incumbent re-election rates were approximately 8 percent higher in 1986 and 1988 than in 1980 and 1982. In 1980 and 1982 voters were clearly angry with the dismal state of the economy, first under President Carter and then under President Reagan. Unsurprisingly, Democratic incumbents took a beating in 1980 (twenty-seven incumbents defeated), while Republican incumbents suffered losses in 1982 (twenty-two incumbents defeated). In contrast, in the 1986 and 1988 elections, the voters expressed satisfaction with the status quo by supporting incumbents of both parties. Only six incumbents were defeated in either 1986 or 1988. Until another congressional election occurs in a year in which the voters focus their discontent on one of the major parties, we will not know for sure if the recent trend toward even higher rates of incumbent re-election is more than just a short-term aberration. Unfortunately for political pundits and scientists, sleepy 1990 does not seem to be shaping up as that year.

DAVID I. LUBLIN
New Haven, Connecticut

To the editors:

Hendrik Hertzberg really doesn't get to the heart of the problem. One can't legitimately blame politicians for wanting to hold on to the power and pelf that comes with national office. It's the Boobus Americanus who is at fault. The solution is not to put a limit on congressional members' terms but on the American citizen's term. If the lazy slob doesn't vote in twelve years—instant deportation. This would solve overcrowding on highways and rock concerts and might even settle the abortion imbroglio.

ROBERT PRIMACK
Gainesville, Florida

Snow job

To the editors:

I enjoyed Mark A. R. Kleiman's article on the futility of the drug interdiction and eradication effort ("Snowed In," April 23) but was disappointed with his conclusion that more street-level drug enforcement is needed. Street-level drug enforcement has been tried for years. According to the FBI's most recent report, we arrested 1,155,200 people for drug offenses in 1988 and have arrested more than 800,000 each year since 1985. Indeed, since 1985 we have arrested thirteen people every minute for drug offenses. How much more evidence do we need that street-level drug enforcement will not work?

Kleiman assumes that legalization will lead to increased use. This assumption is not based on fact. For example, nicotine, the most addictive drug known to man, is available in vending machines and candy stores, yet its use is rapidly declining. The use of alcohol and of caffeine are also going down. The illegality of drugs attracts people, especially the young, to drug use by creating a forbidden fruit, by providing an easy way to rebel against family and society, and by providing a means of making a large profit quickly. In a recent survey the Drug Policy Foundation found that less than 2 percent of those who currently do not use cocaine would try it if it were legal. This evidence would indicate that legalization is likely to result in decreased drug use, especially if it is combined with treatment on demand, money for dealing with the underlying social problems that cause abuse, and the development of effective prevention policies.

KEVIN ZEESE
Washington, D.C.

The writer is counsel and vice president of the Drug Policy Foundation.

To the editors:

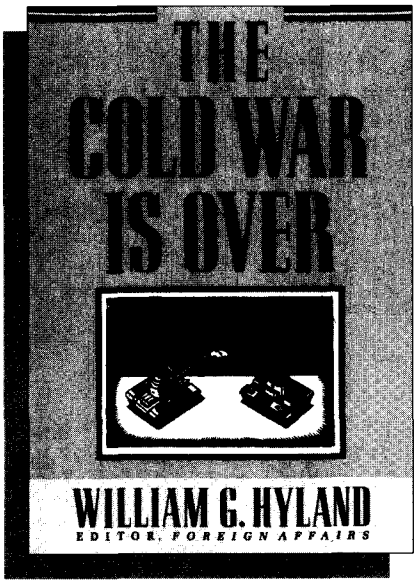
Readers of "Snowed In" may have noticed that I borrowed (at least) one of Peter Reuter's arguments: that interdiction can do harm to source countries by increasing the demand for cocaine at the point of export. My only excuse for neglecting to acknowledge the loan is that we have been trading ideas about the drug markets for so long we sometimes lose track of which ideas are

continued on page 42

HISTORY IS NOW

After a half-century of crisis and confrontation in East-West relations, the Cold War is over. William G. Hyland, editor of *Foreign Affairs*, historian, and a former presidential advisor on national security, reveals how the Cold War began, what kept it going, and why it ended so abruptly.

Incisive, illuminating, and timely, this is required reading for anyone who wants to understand the challenge of the post-Cold War era.



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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JUNE 4, 1990

CAVEAT VICTOR

And they shall beat their swords into Hondas: a consortium of British scrap dealers, *The Washington Post* reports from Vienna, is preparing bids "for up to 10,000 Soviet tanks that, melted down into new steel, would reappear as Japanese-made autos." The European world really is new. But caveat victor: new worlds are unknown worlds. The happy debris of the cold war in Europe can be arranged in many ways, in different configurations of security and insecurity.

It is not surprising that the collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe has kindled virtually eschatological hopes in many Europeans; the pressure that Europe endured since the end of World War II was, for all its philosophical and strategic justification, also immense. The continent has been relieved of its triggery condition. And so there is talk of the denuclearization of Europe, of the superfluity of NATO, of a single Europe united in a paradise of commerce and culture, of a benign and neutral Germany, of a final withdrawal of the mischief-making superpowers into their respective internal difficulties. The historical imagination, chained for so long to a brutal contest between nuclear-armed ideologies, is dizzy.

We are not utterly sober ourselves—at least not as sober as Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, who is a teetotaler about the miracles of 1989. Obviously the threats to the Atlantic alliance have been reduced, transformed, or eliminated. Obviously there are categories of weapons—short-range nuclear weapons, for example, which were stationed in West Germany to deter a land attack by Warsaw Pact armies stationed or mustered in East Germany—that history has made obsolete. (The military utility of these weapons was limited even before the anno mirabilis.) Obviously the classical strategy of NATO, which was designed, as Theodore Draper wrote ten years ago, "for one purpose and one purpose only—security," must be reexamined and revised. Even George Bush grasps that.

We are not among those who refuse to take yes for an answer. After forty years of living by its nerves, NATO won. And not just in 1989: NATO's victory was begun in 1983, when it withstood the anxious simplifications of the European (and especially the German) peace movement and their crude manipulation by the Soviet Union, and installed the Pershings; it was then, almost certainly, that the futility of the old foreign policy must have been keenly felt by the emerging Soviet leadership.

Indeed, with the collapse of East Germany, the Soviet Union watched, with eerie calm, as its greatest nightmare of the past forty years came to pass. Recall that there was never a more cherished objective of Soviet policy than the neutralization of West Germany: that was the famous "wedge" the Soviets would "drive" between the members of the Western alliance. Exactly the opposite befell them. East Germany collapsed into West Germany for the precise purpose of becoming Western in its economy, in its polity, in its security. This was one of the great routs. For this reason, the kickings and the screamings of the Soviets at the "two plus four" talks about German reunification, their rounds of new conditions and demands, should be recognized for what they are: more proof that a major power does not lose graciously. Every day's papers show that two plus four is really five plus one.

Surely the dissolution of NATO would be rather an odd way to celebrate its victory. We say this not for sentimental reasons, though we do not disguise our sentiment for that battered structure. If NATO's reason for being was security, there are many kinds of security; and there is never a time when security is perfect. An assault on the Fulda Gap by the forces of the Warsaw Pact that would lead to the use of NATO's nuclear weapons is no longer the danger, and NATO's theories and forces should be adjusted accordingly. But peace has not yet come to the East. Gorbachev's experiment in perestroika is still an experiment, and though Stalinism is no longer possible in the Soviet Union, Bonapartism is; many of the states of Eastern Europe are in turmoil, or are challenged severely by ethnic and national extremism; and—most pressing of all, perhaps, from a strictly European standpoint—there is the apotheosis of Germany.

These are, all of them, actual or possible problems of security, and all of them require that the Western alli-

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ance not declare that its work is done and ride dashingly out of town. Reformation, yes; retirement, no. Indeed, it is the achievement of German reunification itself that requires NATO's continued existence. The reason is simple: only Germany's membership in the alliance will provide the restraint upon its powers that its neighbors are perfectly right to demand. German neutralism would be nothing but the first stage of German nationalism. World War II and the forty-five years since may have eliminated Germany's imperial urges; yet left to itself, to its excitement about itself and to its almost chilling economic force, Germany would almost certainly recover some of its previous, pre-Adenauer notions about its destiny. History urges hedges. And history suggests that German power cannot be restrained by a balance of other powers: that way always led to war, and there are, in any event, no other powers in Europe to act as a balance.

No, Europe itself must be the balance. But it cannot be that without its relationship to American power. This is the critical point. It is the involvement of the United States in a treaty relationship with the Western European states with which the new Germany must be entangled. If it is entangled in anything less, it will not be entangled enough. The "European mutual security system," the Atlantic alliance without the United States that is frequently discussed as an alternative to NATO, the collective continental neutrality that Vaclav Havel seems to support, will hardly do the trick. Its most powerful member would be precisely the state whose power was the problem it would have to solve. In sum, the reunification of Germany—the defeat of the Soviet Union's fondest geopolitical hope—could turn bad, and worse, without NATO.

A period of triumphalist American detachment from Europe would be an error of historic proportions. Again, this does not mean that American troop levels in Europe, or American nuclear weapons in Europe, or American operational strategies in Europe should remain undisturbed. But without some evidence of American seriousness, without some unified command structure, the new Germany will almost certainly, sooner or later, not be inhibited. Americans for whom this seems paranoid or churlish or far-fetched should consult the living memories of Germany's neighbors.

As Bush's summit with Gorbachev approaches, these are the considerations that the president must have in mind. The victory having been won, it must now be secured. The orneriness of Secretary of State James Baker may come in handy. He and the president, to their credit, seem to have no intention of negotiating anything but a fully sovereign and unified Germany at the heart of the Western alliance.

The appropriate "face-saving devices" for the Soviet Union will be provided: commitments to keep NATO forces out of eastern Germany for a while, a German renunciation of nuclear weapons, and so on. But the fact is that the security of Europe for many generations will depend on the extent to which Bush and Baker understand that we must take advantage of our advantage.

DEAD LEAVES

"We need to assure that women don't have to worry about getting their jobs back after having a child or caring for a child during a serious illness. That is what I mean when I talk about a gentler nation." —George Bush, September 9, 1988, before the Illinois Federation of Republican Women

In spite of this apparent pledge, President Bush's White House staff has recommended that he veto a modest House compromise measure requiring large companies to grant twelve weeks' unpaid leave to employees who are ill, have a new child, or need to take care of a seriously ill child or parent.

It isn't that Gentle George is anti-family or anti-woman, staff members hastened to explain. He fervently hopes that more employers will voluntarily grant leaves to workers with newborns or adoptive children or whose children or parents are stricken with a dread disease. But, an Office of Management and Budget document declared, "this objective can be best achieved voluntarily through the normal collective bargaining process . . . not by the federal government mandating employee benefits."

Well, that would be true if the labor movement were healthy and strong. But it is not, so someone else has got to guarantee minimally humane working conditions for people. That someone has got to be the government. That's the way it is in most of the civilized world and even in a few places that aren't always so civilized. In Chile, for example, employees are guaranteed eighteen weeks of parental leave with 100 percent of pay. Poland guarantees up to twenty-six weeks, also at full pay. France offers sixteen weeks at 90 percent pay. In West Germany, it's fourteen weeks at 100 percent pay; and in Japan, twelve weeks at 60 percent pay.

According to OMB, the House-passed bill would "impose the costs of leave on employers regardless of their ability to absorb such costs, thus reducing their productivity and U.S. competitiveness," and "the impact on smaller businesses would be particularly substantial." But businesses with fifty employees or fewer are exempt under the bill. The costs are minimal—amounting only to health insurance premiums for workers on leave, which is far less than other "mandated benefits" such as Social Security and Occupational Safety and Health.

The productivity/competitiveness argument doesn't make sense either, oft-repeated though it was by lobbyists for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and opponents of the bill on the House floor. Since when do Japan and Germany do things that are anti-competitive? More likely, they calculate that employees work more efficiently when they aren't terrified by the idea that they will be unemployed if they take care of a dying parent.

The Republican Party has done its best to seize the "family" issue from Democrats. Its pompous 1988 platform declared that "the family's most important func-

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tion is to raise the next generation of Americans, handing on to them the Judeo-Christian values of Western civilization and our ideals of liberty. More than anything else, the ability of America's families to accomplish those goals will determine the course our country takes in the century ahead." But sometimes the values of "family" clash with the Republicans' dedication to the free market—or, to put it less charitably, with the special interests of corporate America. With Bush, when the campaign is over and a policy choice has got to be made, the family finishes second.

NOTEBOOK

BLUMENTHAL REDUX: With a bang—this week's cover story—THE NEW REPUBLIC welcomes, or rewelcomes, Sidney Blumenthal, who rejoins the magazine as a senior editor. Veteran readers will remember that Blumenthal covered the 1984 campaign as our national political correspondent. When Bush went to the White House, Blumenthal went to *The Washington Post*, where he remained as a staff writer until this year. He is the author of three acclaimed books on American politics: *The Permanent Campaign, The Rise of the Counter-Establishment*, and *Our Long National Daydream: A Political Pageant of the Reagan Era*. A fourth, *Pledging Allegiance: The Last Campaign of the Cold War*, will be published by Harper & Row in the fall. In 1988 Blumenthal was political consultant to the HBO television series "Tanner '88," by Garry Trudeau and Robert Altman. A native of Chicago and a 1969 graduate of Brandeis, Blumenthal, forty-one, is married and is the father of two young sons.

DROP A DIME: Bureaucracy celebrating itself is an intrinsically amusing spectacle, and never more so than during Public Service Recognition Week, when various government agencies set up tents along the Mall to promote their programs and display their wares. The best freebies this year were at the U.S. Customs Service Tent, which offered a cornucopia of anti-drug paraphernalia. Among the giveaways: full-color posters of Captain America urging youth to join him and the FBI in their battle against drugs; Marvel anti-drug comic books; caps, stickers, and balloons emblazoned with the slogan ZERO TOLERANCE and the 1-800-BE-ALERT line for turning people in. One poster has Uncle Sam holding a telephone with one hand and pointing out with the other: "You Can Help! Report Drug Smuggling to U.S. Customs." There's something a little off about this stuff. Telling children to talk directly to cops creates a climate where false accusations flourish. By encouraging a vivid fantasy in which kids can play at being superheroes by ratting on druggies, this kind of propaganda functions as an invitation to hysteria. Wouldn't it be better to urge kids who have something disturbing to report to go to Mom or Dad, or to a teacher or principal at school? And if it's Mom or Dad they want to finger, they're going to need more protection and counseling than a Customs Service 800 number is likely to give them.

CHOICE WORDS: "It is a choice that should be made by the individual. It is a choice that should not be forbidden to the honest citizen by an overprotective government. . . . It is a choice that should be approached with information and not emotion." The headline above this text reads "A MATTER OF CHOICE." The brochure in which it appears features on its cover a quote from an anonymous rape victim. But it has nothing to do with abortion. The pamphlet is part of the latest disinformation campaign from the National Rifle Association, which is encouraging women to buy handguns for self-protection. In a new NRA television ad, the actress Susan Howard advises in an intimate murmur: "Owning a firearm is a deeply personal decision." Pointing a finger toward the camera, she confides, "But you don't have to do it alone." The NRA number flashes on the screen. A number that is not flashed on the screen is 100, which, according to the Firearms Policy Project, is how many times more likely it is that any handgun will be used in a murder, suicide, or fatal accident than to kill a criminal. It's offensive, of course, for the NRA's publicists to cloak themselves in the rhetoric of the pro-choice movement. The only thing more absurd would be for them to pretend to be pro-life.

SURVEY SAYS: "The results couldn't be plainer. Americans . . . stand four-square behind free expression and overwhelmingly support federal funding for the arts." Well, that's one way to read the results of a recent poll commissioned by Norman Lear's People for the American Way. The other way is as proof of the opposite. Andres Serrano might be pleased to learn that 84 percent of those surveyed agree that the National Endowment for the Arts "should leave funding decisions for art projects to diverse panels of artists and citizens." He will be less pleased to learn that 53 percent think "art should be censored if it offends a majority of people." On the one hand, 74 percent agree with the proposition that "censorship of the arts is not the American way." But then again, 51 percent believe that the NEA "should require artists who receive grants to sign an oath regarding the content of their art." These results might be said to show that Americans are confused about the issues involved in federal funding of the arts and are divided so far as they understand them. But all they really prove is that when biased pollsters ask loaded question, they get back worthless answers.

DROWNING BY NUMBERS: What's the federal deficit for fiscal 1991?: (*a*) $64 billion (the Gramm-Rudman

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target); (*b*) $100 billion (Darman's original estimate); (*c*) $161 billion (the Congressional Budget Office's figure); or (*d*) $165 billion (Darman's latest)? Surprise—it's (*e*) none of the above. We speculate that the actual deficit will be at least $225 billion, and probably more like $260 billion. The final figure is the one you get if you count the costs of the S&L bailout and don't count the Social Security surplus. (See "Surplus Value" by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, page 13.) Republicans and Democrats agree on one thing: the real number is too huge to talk about. For the past several years, the first principle of our budget-makers has been: if it's painful, hide it. And journalists are playing along: few news reports have mentioned that even (*d*), Richard Darman's newest scary-sounding estimate, uses $64 billion of surplus Social Security funds to mask the true deficit. This omission is symptomatic of the current approach to covering budgetary negotiations—i.e., write down whatever line the powers-that-be are pushing at the moment. Bush and Darman aren't about to start using honest numbers. It's up to the press to remind us what they are. •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

THREE SUMMITEERS

By Fred Barnes

President Bush was brimming with clichés. On May 8, at a meeting in the Cabinet Room with Republican congressional leaders, he talked about the budget summit, then a week off. He cited "the severity of the problem" but gave no specifics. He said there would be "tidal waves" of controversy during the budget talks. They should "keep their snorkels above water." (This, Bush said later, is advice his mother used to give him.) Senate GOP Leader Bob Dole and House Minority Leader Bob Michel said Republicans should be "open-minded" about raising taxes. Just before the meeting, Senator Alan Simpson had replied to a reporter in the photo-op pool who, noticing the all-male cast, asked, "Where are the women?" His answer: "Up at Wellesley." Simpson wasn't as funny once the meeting began. He listed a string of possible tax hikes. Neither Bush nor anyone else responded. The meeting soon broke up.

This was the moment that disarray set in. It may also mark the moment that Bush's political power and high polls began a long decline, but we won't know that for a few months. At the meeting, Bush didn't explain why he'd been prompted to convene the summit. He didn't spell out exactly what he hopes to achieve and what he wants to avert. Bush and the leaders didn't coordinate what the White House and Republicans should say about the summit. So they said different things. "We handled this terribly," says a senior White House official. "We really hurt ourselves, short-term. It wasn't necessary."

Simpson, Dole, and Michel rushed out of the White House and talked up taxes. Among the possibilities in a budget agreement, Simpson said, are "value-added taxes, additional user fees, taxes on booze and cigarettes, a national lottery, a 1 percent national sales tax, all sorts of things." Dole and Michel indicated that coming to grips with budget reality requires higher taxes. Though Dole has gotten a lot of attention for being sympathetic to boosting taxes, Michel is even more so. He likes the idea of raising the marginal income tax on the wealthy to 33 percent, and he doesn't look favorably on cutting the capital gains tax rate. He once told colleagues that the administration could muddle along a few more years without curbing the deficit, "but I don't know what would be left of the country." For Bush, the problem in all the tax talk was that it sounded as if the White House is advocating higher taxes, not just willing to consider them. "We were sandbagged by the leaders," says a Bush aide. Maybe, but no one told them not to say what they did.

Sununu tried to rectify the situation. He's a clever politician, but he acted clumsily and naively this time. On a controversial issue, the method for putting out fresh spin is to tell one reporter for a major news organization like *The New York Times*. That way the background rule—no attribution by name—is likely to be honored. But if you blab to an entire press pool on Barbara Bush's plane returning from Costa Rica, as Sununu did on May 9, you're asking for trouble. One of the reporters is bound to identify you by name. *The Washington Post* did, making it clear in its story that Sununu had said the White House would reject any Democratic proposals at the summit for raising taxes. This made it look as if the White House was acting in bad faith by precluding things before the summit began.

On May 10 Bush, Sununu, and Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater met in the Oval Office to straighten out the mess. They decided that Fitzwater should merely state Bush's position that there are "no preconditions" to the summit. "That sounds perfect," said Sununu. Sununu told Bush and Fitzwater that he'd never said, as the *Post* claimed, that the president would veto Democratic tax schemes at the summit. "Tell them that's crazy," Bush said. "You don't have a veto in negotiations." Fitzwater did his duty. "The president feels there should be no preconditions," he told reporters. A veto? "That's crazy," Fitzwater said.

For all the confusion, the budget summit is the logical extension of Bush's—and budget director Richard Darman's—approach to government. Bush rejects Ronald Reagan's strategy of declaring what you want and then fighting for it, maybe splitting the difference in the end. He prefers either to propose what's minimally accept-

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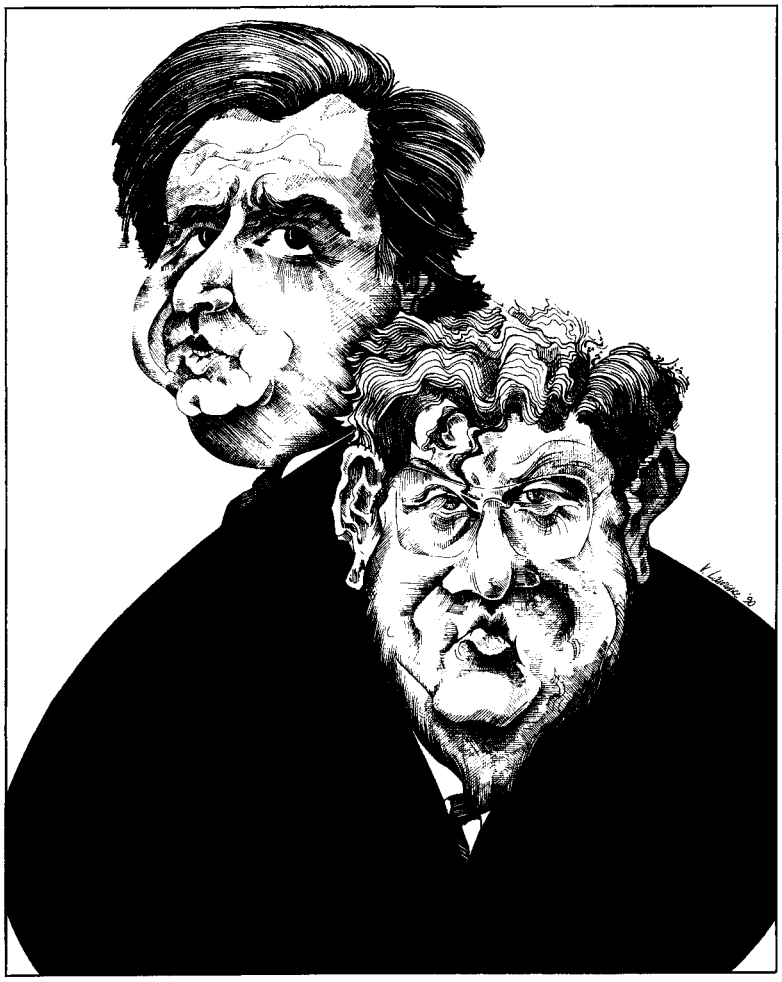
able to him and then refuse to budge, or to create a process and then figure out what he wants to gain from it. Darman likes the second approach, which is why he lobbied Bush and members of Congress for weeks for a budget summit. Darman thinks that once he gets his opponents in a room for a private gabfest, he's got the upper hand. He's smarter, he's a better negotiator, he's got more experience in making deals, so he'll get what he wants.

There's a hitch this time. It's not clear what he, Bush, Sununu, etc., want, except in the broad sense of a budget agreement that brings the deficit in line with the Gramm-Rudman target ($64 billion in 1991, but that might be revised upward). The White House wants fifty things, but no one thing. Darman has talked privately about everything from a "carbon tax" on sources of pollution to a Gramm-Rudman change that would permit automatic cuts twice a year instead of once. And Sununu, appearing on "Meet the Press" on May 13, pointedly declined to rule out a cut in Social Security benefits in a budget agreement. He called this "something tough that has to be talked about within the summit."



DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Until early spring the White House thought it had all the budget leverage it needed in the form of the automatic spending cuts, or sequester, under Gramm-Rudman. If Democrats didn't agree to a budget compromise, then the cuts would fall. But the projected deficit—remember, this is all guesswork about the shortfall for 1991—began to swell because of slow economic growth, burgeoning estimates for the savings and loan bailout, higher interest rates, and so on. This raised the prospect of a $50 billion to $75 billion sequester, which terrifies the White House. At that level, large parts of the federal government would stop functioning, says Fitzwater. "Do you really want a 25 percent cutback in the FBI?" Darman asked a colleague. Thus, the summit.

Of course, Bush hasn't mentioned any of this publicly. He backed into the summit without explaining why the new budget numbers stirred him to move. The closest thing to a White House explanation came from Darman on "This Week with David Brinkley" on May 13. "What we thought might be a $36 or $37 billion problem in meeting the target could be anywhere from $50 to $100 [billion] to over $100 [billion]," he said. Why didn't Bush explain? He didn't want to create national fear of an economic catastrophe. Had he done that, he'd be expected to take drastic action even if the summit produced nothing. Bush didn't want to paint himself into a corner. At a press conference on May 16, he said he doesn't want to address the American people until a bipartisan agreement is reached.

Bush hasn't been forthright on the status of his pledge of "no new taxes" either. His tack, in a pinch, is to say as little as possible. Fitzwater insists that Bush disposed of no new taxes at his press conference on May 3, the day word of the summit leaked. He was asked by John Cochran of NBC why he hadn't repeated his pledge. "You haven't heard it because I'm going to sit down and talk to them about what I said I was going to talk about," Bush responded. That was the sum total of his rollback.

Small wonder, then, that Republicans in Congress haven't the foggiest idea where Bush stands on taxes. House GOP Whip Newt Gingrich says it's "inconceivable" that Bush would agree to an income tax hike. Vin Weber, also a member of the House Republican leadership, isn't so sure. Gingrich says a budget agreement "will certainly include capital gains." Others aren't positive about that. The secret wish of the White House is a freeze on entitlements. But Bush would never press publicly for something that politically risky. And it's unclear whether he'll promote it behind closed doors at the summit.

Bush's most difficult choice at the summit may be choosing between Darman and Sununu, the twin towers of domestic policy-making. The summit is essentially Darman's show. He now decides which administration officials go on TV to talk about the sum-

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mit, and when. On May 14 Fitzwater told reporters that reaching a budget agreement would take "weeks, if not months." Darman read a wire report with this quote and contacted Fitzwater instantly. The operative phrase, he said, is "as soon as possible." Darman wants to forge a deal in a week or two or three, but above all he wants a deal. Sununu argues that the White House must be ready to walk away from a bad deal. Sununu, the politician, wants a deal that helps Bush politically in 1990 and 1992. Darman, the bureaucrat, wants a deal that eases the pain of governing. Tough choice, exactly the kind Bush doesn't like to make. •

What lies buried in Carpentras.

THE FRENCH AND THE JEWS

By Martin Peretz

PARIS

This time one must say to the credit of the French that they did not try to dismiss an anti-Semitic enormity as just the work of crazed individuals. It was, of course, a crazy deed; but the craziness has a past. The defiling of fresh graves and newly buried bodies in the old Jewish cemetery at Carpentras was not an isolated event. Though it was grotesque even by the standards of anti-Semitism, it evoked many recent acts from the ancient repertory of Jew-hatred. This latest outrage, then, could not be shrugged off without the shrug being taken, in France and elsewhere, as another sign of indifference to the re-emergence of perhaps the ugliest undercurrent of French history; and it was not shrugged off.

Only a few weeks ago, on the occasion of the forty-fifth anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe, the newsweekly *L'Express* unearthed for its readers a long-obscured instance of this undercurrent: another tale of purely French initiative and zeal, altogether unprovoked by the Nazis, in the tearing away of Jewish children from their mothers to be shipped off to the death camps. The legend of French innocence in the Jewish catastrophe, already frayed but hardly retired, was dealt yet another blow. The echoes were still resonating when the news from Carpentras gave them a very contemporary ring indeed.

Still, if the usual anonymous madmen were not mustered to bear the blame for the crime at Carpentras, there was nonetheless another scapegoat on whom virtually the entire French political class could focus as the vague begetter of the national shame. He is Jean-Marie Le Pen, the foul demagogue who is the leader of the all-but-avowedly fascist National Front and a member of the European Parliament besides. He will do for a suspect, not least because all of the established parties think they have lost marginal votes to his movement. They hope the sheer gruesomeness of Carpentras will tarnish him even in the eyes of the most disaffected and alienated lumpen-citizenry. But if the old parties have really lost those votes to the National Front, it is because Le Pen and his cohort have only articulated more openly what is already whispered by so many others.

As if Le Pen is the whole of the problem! For years after the war there prevailed in France, as elsewhere in Europe, a taboo against explicit anti-Semitism. But cultures are poor censors of themselves. The taboo was gradually undermined, not least by the perverse historical revisionism about the Holocaust, the denial or diminishment of it, by Professor Robert Faurisson and lesser folk. The Holocaust, it was claimed, was an invention of Zionism. This revision seemed to promise that if the guilt for the Holocaust (a guilt that fell on all of Europe) could be lifted, the ban on anti-Jewish libels would be lifted, too. That's why Le Pen traffics in revisionist currency (and why Louis Farrakhan and Jesse Jackson do, too).

But French anti-Semitism is not a depredation of just the right. The contribution of the left to the poisoned atmosphere is rather different. The left does not deny the crimes of anti-Semitism, but, treacherous to the truth, it imputes equivalent crimes to Israel. The anti-Israeli left in France acts as if you can be violently anti-Zionist in a profoundly anti-Semitic environment and expect no consequences. And so its fabrications have been widely taken up by Arabs in France, who have become victims themselves of the country's habitual xenophobia. The lie is not less huge because it is uttered in behalf of the Palestinians. In any case it has the same effect of unburdening Europe of its past, and foisting the criminality onto the Jews themselves; and this in turn becomes a kind of warrant for anti-Semitism, closing the ugly circle.

On May 14 some 200,000 French men and women surged toward the Place de la République and the Bastille in a monumental protest against anti-Semitism. For the first time since the war, a president of the republic joined a demonstration in the streets. With François Mitterrand were other members of government and leaders of the opposition. They too had been stunned out of their comfort. Their presence, and the presence of leading churchmen, gave the protesters (who were mostly Jews) the sense that their anguish was shared by others.

But that is not what made this particular march a rite of passage for the Jews of France. When they donned—for many of them, alas, for the first time voluntarily—the yellow star of their suffering, and when they carried aloft that same star in the blue and white of the Jewish nation, they were breaking with their own traditions of

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timidity and quiescence, of the most callow forms of assimilation and acculturation. The French Jews were loudly telling their fellow citizens of France that they were, and they wanted to be, different—and to lose no rights for their difference. On that day, they were passionate to prove that they belonged . . . to themselves, to the Jews.

The question is whether France will accept them—and accept also others, notably the Arabs, whom it has had so much trouble digesting—with differences not denied. History is not a ground for hope. France said to its Jews two centuries ago that they are equal. But anti-Semitism has persisted, and sometimes raged, in France since "emancipation" because the égalité had a catch. The Jews could be equal if they became like the people they were equal to—that is, if they assimilated. They could be of the "Mosaic persuasion," that's all. Many Jews were willing to accede to this self-nullifying condition of citizenship. Still, Jewish self-erasure notwithstanding, the French broke the bargain. The agreement did not hold. It did not hold for Captain Dreyfus. It did not hold for the victims of Vichy. And it did not hold for the dead of Carpentras.

The French talent for exclusiveness extends elsewhere, too. Nearly 10 percent of the French population is North African Muslim and black African. Immigration policy is always vexing, of course, and exclusion is not always the worst of evils, but nearly everyone in France seems to think that the number of Africans and Muslims is too high, probably including some Jews who think that they have been in France long enough to say who shouldn't be. Before Carpentras, the Socialist government, while repeating ritual denunciations of racism, was preparing the way for an immigration policy meant to placate that racism. The racism and the placation have roots in the great historic French distrust of the Other. In France today, of course, Jews and Arabs see each other as the Other; and the French see them as Others, too. The irony is that the French also see them as the same. •

Democrats miss a big opportunity.

SURPLUS VALUE

By Daniel Patrick Moynihan

On the final Friday morning of 1989, at a sparsely attended press conference, I announced that I would introduce legislation to return the Social Security Trust Funds to a pay-as-you-go basis. Since then the proposal has been pronounced dead by assorted authorities. Yet it does not die. It has acquired a kind of street life, and it is mentioned to me wherever I go. In almost forty years of political campaigns and public office of various sorts I have never seen a proposal (and a fairly abstract proposal at that) win as much support as rapidly as this has—except within the Democratic Party. Apart from Governor Mario Cuomo and Democratic National Chairman Ron Brown, established Democratic figures have been either silent or opposed.

This is strange, for it is entirely within the power of the Democratic Congress to present the Republican administration with a proposal that would instantly increase the take-home pay of some 132 million Americans by up to $600 a year per worker, $1,200 a year per family—this at a time when real wages have been stagnant or declining for fifteen years. The fact that we have not done this, and evidently have no intention of doing it, has produced a second debate about the state of the Democratic Party. Much of this discussion is still behind the scenes, although thoughtful journalists are beginning to report on it. Thus, Joe Klein in *New York*:

> The Democrats are engaged in a quietly furious bout of internecine warfare between the *politicals*—pollsters, consultants, and bureaucrats-in-waiting who'd like to see the party be more aggressive and try to elect a president this century—and the *congressionals*, whose basic impulses are survival and compromise.

There is a touch of bewilderment in some of these reports. Thus, Jonathan Salant in the *Syracuse Herald American*:

> One would think that the Democrats, who have been shut out of the White House so long that it seems that the Republican National Committee's headquarters should be at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, would seize upon the tax issue the way a person in the desert would seize a glass of water.

A touch of impatience has appeared, as with sports writers observing an inexplicably inept ball team. Thus, Alan Emory in *The Watertown Daily Times*: "There is one word for the leadership of the Democratic Party on . . . [the] Social Security maneuver: Stupid."

DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN is a senator from New York.

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Some analysts have asked whether we might be seeing a new kind of politics emerging, with Democrats in control of one branch of government, Republicans the other, dividing the spoils and pretty much ignoring the country at large. If so, the Republicans, at least, are not content with this arrangement. They mean to take over Congress as well, and 1992 is the big year. No one seems to be running against the incumbent Republican president. The House will have been redistricted following the 1990 census, with several dozen seats transferred from Democratic regions in the North and East to Republican precincts in the South and West. The Senate is vulnerable as well, with many more Democratic than Republican senators up for re-election.

By way of background, in 1977 a set of increases in the rate of Social Security contributions (under the Federal Insurance Contributions Act) was put in place that, in effect, moved us from the established pay-as-you-go system to a partially funded system. These rate increases extended over a thirteen-year period. The final one went into effect this past January 1.

Little attention was paid to this shift in policy, which by definition would create a long succession of large surpluses. On the contrary, the Reagan administration came into office in 1981 proclaiming the imminent "bankruptcy" of the Trust Funds, a scare tactic that went back to the Roosevelt-Landon campaign of 1936.

Even so, the surpluses appeared and grew. In 1987, with the Democrats once again in the majority in the Senate, I became chairman of the Subcommittee on Social Security and embarked on an extended inquiry into this wholly new development. The General Accounting Office looked into the matter for us. Authorities such as Robert J. Myers, that eminent Republican and longtime chief actuary of Social Security, offered their counsel in hearings.

A range of documents emerged with a common theme: These monies were not general revenues and were not to be treated as such. They were trust funds. If we cannot save the trust fund surpluses, the money should be returned to the 132 million employees and self-employed and six million employers who pay it. There was something like a bipartisan consensus on this issue: save the surplus or return it. It did not last. It was destroyed in 1989.

Another Republican administration came to office pledged to "no new taxes" despite a large and growing deficit that was beginning to compound of its own accord. (It now requires all of the income taxes collected west of Mississippi to pay the interest on the accumulated debt.) Even so, the Bush team fostered the impression that if a "slide-by" budget could be agreed upon for the coming fiscal year, the administration would sit down with the relevant congressional committees and work out a "grand accord" to arrest the deficits of the Reagan years. By the end of 1989 no such accord had even been attempted.

There is a simple, plausible explanation for this: 1989 was the year the cold war ended. That meant defense outlays would be coming down. It was also the year the Social Security surplus first reached $1 billion *a week*, promising to rise to $4 billion by 2002 and then on to $8 billion! Inspiration struck: the "read my lips" pledge could hold after all. George Will suggested: "The Bush administration is part of a single-minded strategy to use the Social Security surpluses to rent the White House for Republicans for the rest of the century, and beyond."

In the meantime, I had announced my pay-as-you-go proposal. Normally such an announcement would receive little notice, but the administration, beginning with the president, reacted as if someone had revealed a profoundly important secret. It was now clear that we were not reducing the operating budget deficit, but only financing a larger and larger share of it with a regressive payroll tax.

What followed will serve as a prelude to the present debate about the state of the Democratic Party. In brief, the press sensed that we would blow it.

Thomas Oliphant of *The Boston Globe* first. On January 7 he wrote: "The powers that be can't say they weren't warned about their annual theft of Social Security contributions to help finance the Reagan-Bush budget deficits." He explained the measure, reviewed its merits, suggested its appeal. Then this: "From bitter experience, it is unwise to predict that Democrats can shake off their stupor and offer bold, new policies."

Five weeks later Pat Wechsler of *Newsday* reported the initial reaction of Ed Rollins, co-chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee: "I assumed the Democrats would grab that issue and create a lot of havoc among our [middle-class, small-business-type] constituencies." Wechsler continued: "The former Reagan adviser said party leaders were almost in a frenzy by the time the congressional session opened in late January. . . . Then he remembered something: these are Democrats."

Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell has promised a clear up or down vote on the bill, and has been as supportive as his often unenviable position allows. Still, the question is why Democrats have such difficulty with such an elemental issue. Trust funds are being raided. Republican Senator John Heinz asserts that the word for what is going on is embezzlement. The common law is nowhere more strict than in the matter of trust funds. This is something people know; it implies a standard of conduct. That standard applies to public no less than to private trusts. Never mind technicalities.

And yet the term most often invoked to explain the party's palpable fear of the proposal is that it would not be . . . *responsible*. This is put in quite simple terms. There is a large deficit. Dealing honestly with the trust funds would increase that large deficit. Finding substitute revenues—an afternoon's exercise, if the truth be known—would open the party to the charge of taxing and spending (albeit there is no spending here, in the sense of government programs).

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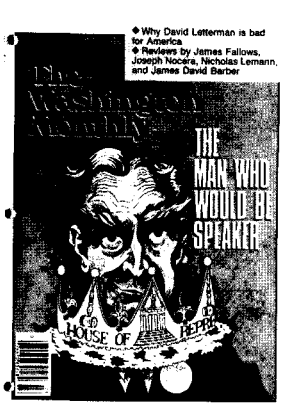
WE KNEW WRIGHT FROM THE START


Why David Letterman is bad for America
Reviews by James Fallows, Joseph Nocera, Nicholas Lemann, and James David Barber
The Washington Monthly
THE MAN WHO WOULD BE SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPS

Three years before the downfall of House Speaker Jim Wright, *The Washington Monthly* warned its readers: "If Tip O'Neill seems like the sort of guy who would write out a taxpayer endorsed check to everyone who tried to sell him swampland in Florida, Jim Wright seems more like the guy selling the land."

And that's not the first time we anticipated the news that would later make headlines . . .

➥ Years *before* the Challenger disaster, we warned that the space shuttle was unsafe, saying, "Here's the plan. Suppose one of the solid-fueled boosters fails. The plan is, you die."

➥ Months *before* the stock market crash in 1987, we warned that the programmed trading and low-margin stock options could turn a bad day into Black Monday.

➥ Months *before* the Iran-Contra scandal broke in newspapers, we warned readers, "This National Security Council staff is the worst in history."

➥ **While the national media kept silent about the disgraceful performance of Washington, D.C. mayor Marion Barry—and while *The Washington Post* was still endorsing Barry for re-election—we were uncovering the Barry administration's incompetence and corruption—ahead not only of the *Post*, but of *The New Republic*, and local Washington magazines as well.**

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The fact is that we are *not* being responsible. We are being programmed. The Reagan administration decided early on that a protracted budget deficit would paralyze Democrats on the domestic front. Any proposed initiative would be countered with the argument that there was no money, that the deficit would only worsen. (Observe the fate of the excellent proposals of the Pepper Commission on health insurance.) To repeat, a decision was made. In his first televised address to the nation, on February 5, 1981, the new president declared: "There were always those who told us that taxes couldn't be cut until spending was reduced. Well, you know we can lecture our children about extravagance until we run out of voice and breath. Or we can cut their extravagance by simply reducing their allowance."

Eight years later, on December 8, 1988, in response to a question about the deficits, President Reagan told a press conference:

> When I came here, for almost half a century the debate on the Hill, in the Congress, had always been more big spending programs, more power for the federal government, more intervention in private affairs by the federal government, as against those who were preaching less. Well, now today, and for a very long time, the very question that was asked here about the deficit—the argument on the Hill today is not more spending; the argument is how best we can reduce the deficit.

Somehow Democrats did not get it. Our political imagination simply could not comprehend the idea of an administration deliberately creating a crisis. President Reagan, Richard Cohen writes in *The Washington Post*, "left the country with a deficit that is not incidental to policy, but defines it."

The plain fact is Democrats ought to be attracted to a proposal to raise take-home pay—responsibly or otherwise—for the blunt reason that the United States has been experiencing an unprecedented period of stagnant wages and income. In 1989 the average factory gross wage in the United States (in 1977 dollars), $167 a week, was $20 *lower* than 1970. The median family income in 1988, at $32,191, was a mere $82 above the level of 1973 (in real terms). But given the growth in FICA taxes for that period, from $1,878 to $2,418, the net change over the fifteen years from 1973 to 1988 is *minus* $458! And it was Democrats who enacted those FICA increases, worsening an already flat period of family income extending almost the length of a generation.

Just shy of thirty years ago, I came to Washington with the Kennedy administration. I became an assistant secretary of labor, with (nominal) oversight of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. At that time *the* number in Washington was the unemployment rate, then hovering between 5 percent and 6 percent. Calendars were marked with the day the monthly report was due. The commissioner would let me see it for, oh, two minutes or so before rushing it down the hall to the secretary, who would rush it over to the president. Up a point, down a point, unchanged: whatever, the unemployment rate was too high, a statement that America could do better and should.

At times I wonder. What if, in 1961, median family income in the United States had not risen but fallen during the fifteen-odd years since the end of the Second World War? Would that not have been *the* issue on which we focused our attention and energies? As it happened, real median family income had risen almost by half since the end of the war. Then commenced an extraordinary surge: 1961, $22,000; 1962, $23,000; 1963, $24,000. And so upward, $25,000, $26,000, $27,000, $28,000, $29,000, finally in 1969, $30,000. Had we continued at this pace, median family income in 1988 would have been just under $50,000. Instead, it was stuck at $32,191—and this is the highest it's been since '73!

Women by the scores of millions have gone to work just to keep family income steady. (In 1975, 47.4 percent of women with children were in the work force. By 1988, this had risen to 65 percent.) And what do Democrats have to say on this subject? Nothing. Hence Michel Oreskes's question in *The New York Times*: "What is a Democrat, anyway? Once perceived as the party of compassion and progress, Democrats are now considered by many Americans as a fragmented bunch whose policies are likely to produce (if they produce anything at all) too much spending on the poor and too many burdens on working people."

Oreskes, like most of the journalists I have been citing, was in grade school when John F. Kennedy was inaugurated. He has no recollection of a Democratic Party that thought in majoritarian terms, insisting that the unemployment rate is everybody's business. All he has to go by is what he sees now. And as with him, so with everyone else. If your family income has not increased in fifteen years, there is likely to be one thing you will know about the Democratic Party, and that is that the party does not know about you.

There are soundly Democratic economic arguments for returning Social Security to pay-as-you-go. The FICA contribution is, in effect, an excise tax on labor, raising the cost to employers of hiring people—especially hiring low-skill, low-wage people. Lowering the rate would create jobs—perhaps a million new jobs over a decade. But in the end this is not what the Social Security issue is about. Nor is it about federal revenue. Of course the loss has to be made up. It is not that much at this point. Returning $55 billion in FICA taxes in calendar year 1991 translates into a $38 billion net reduction in federal "revenues" in fiscal year 1991 (after accounting for increased income tax receipts from the resulting higher income). The point, however, is that these are *not* revenues. They are insurance contributions. Once that point is agreed upon, *then* you go on to make up the "loss." But it needs to be done promptly. Once we are dependent on a $5 billion or $6 billion *weekly* surplus, it will be beyond the system's capacity for change. The Democratic Party, as they say down South, had better listen up. •

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Ratting Pol Pot's bones.

SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET

By Stephen J. Morris

For two decades the Cambodian people have suffered from war and totalitarian tyranny on a scale unprecedented in modern history. Today Cambodia is at a turning point, one that offers great hope and great danger. In the wake of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the hope lies in a historic political agreement between the major powers on an interim United Nations takeover of Cambodia that would guarantee Vietnam's troop withdrawal and free and fair elections. The danger lies in the Vietnamese Communists' determination to subvert such an agreement. Tragically, Hanoi's wish to subvert the peace process is being aided by some Americans.

There continues to be confusion about the Cambodian contenders for power, two rival Communist parties and a non-Communist coalition. The more famous Communist group is, of course, the Khmer Rouge—the Kampuchean Communist Party led by Pol Pot. It was responsible for the mass executions, starvation, and disease that eviscerated the Cambodian population between April 1975 and December 1978. Since 1982 the Khmer Rouge has claimed to have become democratic and capitalist. But captured documents and defector testimony suggest that it remains hyper-Maoist in its domestic ideological objectives.

The Khmer Rouge is lavishly supplied by China, but with an army of 40,000, it has also captured so much Soviet weaponry from the Phnom Penh regime that even if China were to cut off all aid, it could continue to fight on for several more years. Part of its strength derives from coercion in its conscription of soldiers and civilian labor. But part of it, especially among those too young to have understood the nightmare years of 1975-78, lies in its uncompromising hostility toward the Vietnamese—a primordial sentiment toward a hereditary enemy that is shared by virtually all Cambodians.

The other Cambodian Communist Party, the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), was created by the Vietnamese Communists in 1951, to pursue their concept of a Vietnamese-controlled Indochinese federation. Since Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978, which installed the current Phnom Penh regime, Cambodian defectors have described how Vietnamese advisers direct the government and army of Phnom Penh. The Vietnamese contend, with some justice, that their invasion saved Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge. But since 1979 the KPRP has been led by unrepentant former members of the Khmer Rouge—the top three are Heng Samrin, Chea Sim, and Hun Sen—who fled to Vietnam only after Pol Pot's paranoid terror began to be directed against them.

Their current regime is unquestionably milder than the one in which they formerly served. But as with Laos, Vietnam, and China before the Tiananmen Square massacre, Phnom Penh's liberalism lies only in its economic policies. As the former resident Red Cross worker Esmerelda Luciolli demonstrates in her book *Le Mur de Bambou*, the government of Phnom Penh remains fundamentally Stalinist. In recent years Amnesty International and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights have documented a prison system where victims of arbitrary arrest are subject to beatings and torture.

The Phnom Penh army has 40,000 regular troops plus a 60,000-man militia and is heavily armed by the Soviet Union. But morale is so poor that only one month after the September 1989 purported withdrawal of all Vietnamese troops, the Phnom Penh forces in western Cambodia began to crumble. Hanoi's leaders then urgently reintroduced thousands of elite Vietnamese special forces to hold besieged towns. This year thousands more Vietnamese troops have been reintroduced into the fighting. Clearly the Phnom Penh regime standing alone cannot provide a barrier to the return of the Khmer Rouge.

The third Cambodian force is the non-Communist resistance (NCR), a coalition of royalists led by the deposed former chief of state, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, claiming 17,000 men under arms; and two feuding republican factions, each claiming the banner of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF). One KPNLF group, loyal to former Prime Minister Son Sann, works mainly on education, propaganda, and international relations. It does not control the 15,000 troops that are loyal to the KPNLF military, led by General Sak Suth Sakhan. The non-Communists are lightly armed by China and some Southeast Asian countries. The United

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States provides them with non-lethal aid.

Hanoi and its friends have made much of the political alliance of the NCR with the Khmer Rouge in the U.N.-recognized Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea. But most of the NCR's leaders and all of its soldiers are survivors of Pol Pot's holocaust; they dread his return to power. The political alliance reflects a sober strategic judgment about the need for a truce with one's weaker enemy in order to contain one's stronger enemy. The alliance was also forced upon the NCR as a condition for receiving military assistance from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Chinese. And the NCR hoped that the international legitimacy provided by membership in a U.N.-recognized "government" might encourage American military aid. Yet the Chinese have given only a fraction of their aid to the NCR, the Reagan administration offered no lethal aid, and the Bush administration's desire was blocked by Senator Robert Byrd. Thus the NCR has been given no chance to overtake Pol Pot's forces in armed strength.

The lack of military ties between the Khmer Rouge and the KPNLF is reflected in their respective military strategies. The KPNLF, eschewing all military cooperation with the Khmer Rouge, has pursued a conventional strategy, seizing several towns and villages in the western province of Battambang in order to establish a "liberated zone." The Khmer Rouge, meanwhile, pursues a guerrilla strategy in the countryside, which it combines with political work in the villages. The Sihanouk forces have shadowed both the Khmer Rouge and KPNLF, occasionally cooperating with either militarily, but establishing their own political presence in certain rural areas. The Phnom Penh regime has secured the main population centers, from which it launches armored sweeps. Anti-Hanoi forces made some gains with the Vietnamese military withdrawal last September, but since troops were reintroduced neither side appears capable of dealing the other a crippling blow.

Thus, no military solution to the war is likely. Only a comprehensive political settlement can resolve the conflict. In the fall of 1989, the possibility of such a settlement emerged in the form of a new political initiative put forth by the Australian government and advocated in this country by Representative Stephen Solarz. Since January the initiative has been accepted by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, most significantly the Soviet Union, China, and the United States. The plan is for an enhanced U.N. presence in Cambodia that would prepare, monitor, and enforce truly free and fair elections. It would involve a substantial number of peacekeeping troops as well as government administrators. A large percentage of the cost would be borne by Japan, which is eager to invest in all three countries of Indochina. If the U.N. proposal is accepted, Vietnamese soldiers will finally be forced to leave, and the warring Cambodian factions will be either disarmed or relocated to remote areas of the country. A residual U.N. peacekeeping force will remain behind until the newly elected government is able to handle its internal security problems alone.

The idea was enthusiastically endorsed by the non-Communist Cambodians. After an extended delay of equivocation and silence, and probably under Chinese pressure, the Khmer Rouge also agreed to the proposal. Only the Phnom Penh regime, obviously under instructions from Hanoi, has balked. Although the ostensible reason is Hanoi's and Phnom Penh's concern about legitimizing the Khmer Rouge through any agreement, in fact they fear the effects of a free political campaign, which they know they cannot win. Hanoi wants the world and the Cambodian people to face a simple choice between Pol Pot's Communists and Hanoi's. But essential to this strategy is a cutoff of American aid to, and Western support for, the NCR.

A campaign for such a cutoff began in Europe last fall with the broadcast of a television documentary, "Year 10" (referring to the anniversary of the Vietnamese invasion and overthrow of Pol Pot), by John Pilger, an Australian tabloid journalist based in London. The film claimed the United States and Britain were directly supporting the return of the Khmer Rouge. The next day British MPs were inundated with phone calls and letters of protest. Although Pilger has an extensive résumé in support of Hanoi, the poorly briefed British Parliament and Foreign Office panicked. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd soon dispatched an emissary to Phnom Penh. A similar documentary, "Peter Jennings Reports: From the Killing Fields," aired April 26 on ABC. The documentary raised the legitimate question of why the United States supports the allies of the Khmer Rouge. But it made no attempt to explain American motives fairly, denied a continuing Vietnamese presence in Cambodia, whitewashed Phnom Penh's human rights record, and insinuated that the United States was secretly arming Pol Pot's forces.

The American campaign's most active publicist is Jeremy Stone, son of the late I. F. Stone and president of the Federation of American Scientists. Stone is a prominent member of an umbrella group called the Campaign to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge, which consists mostly of activists sympathetic to Hanoi from groups like the American Friends Service Committee and the Asia Resource Center. But the campaign's position has also enlisted support from former Secretary of State Edmund Muskie, former CIA director William Colby, and former Reagan administration counsel Michael Horowitz. All three are obviously sincere in their motivation to avoid the return of the Khmer Rouge. But they show little understanding of Cambodian history and values, and they accept at face value the stated good intentions of the Phnom Penh regime. For example, on the basis of a one-week visit to Cambodia, Muskie concluded that Hun Sen was a genuine nationalist, and Horowitz, after a separate visit, surmised that Hun Sen was "more of a free marketeer than Milton Friedman." But neither Muskie nor Horowitz (nor Stone) understands the Cambodian language. It is unclear what a guided tour could have taught them

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about the Phnom Penh regime that refuted all of the Cambodian refugee and defector accounts.

On Capitol Hill, where (thanks largely to Solarz's political strength) the House voted 413-0 in support of the U.N. peace plan, the campaign has focused on the Senate. Alan Cranston has drafted a resolution calling for the United States to end its isolation of Phnom Penh, and John Kerry and Bob Kerrey are preparing a resolution calling for a cutoff of American support for Cambodia's non-Communists. Rumors of the legislation have already begun unifying Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Laotian groups in the United States. (By the way, whereas the Hanoi lobby is overwhelmingly white and has virtually no ethnic Cambodian support, the anti-Hanoi lobby, built around the Boston-based Council for Peace and Freedom in Cambodia, is overwhelmingly ethnic Cambodian and is led and supported by survivors of the Khmer Rouge holocaust.)

The arguments underlying the proposed Cranston and Kerry-Kerrey resolutions are flawed. The first argument is simply that the Phnom Penh regime is preferable to a Khmer Rouge regime. This is true—but since every regime in every country in the world since Hitler's death has been preferable to the Khmer Rouge, it is hardly a powerful recommendation. And this argument overlooks the existence of another alternative to the Khmer Rouge—the non-Communists, who are neither totalitarians nor agents of Vietnamese colonialism.

The second argument in support of Phnom Penh does concede that the non-Communists may be a preferable alternative but asserts that they are not a viable one. Again, this is how Hanoi and Phnom Penh officials would like us to see it. And it is true that lacking the firepower, the experience, and the amoral ruthlessness of the Khmer Rouge, the non-Communists have made less of an impact in terms of sabotage or terror. But they have raised an army of more than 30,000 men, and in the wake of the Vietnamese troop withdrawal they captured a string of government towns in the west of the country, only to lose some of them with the reintroduction of Vietnamese troops. Had they received even half the aid that China has provided the Khmer Rouge, or half what the Soviet Union and Vietnam have provided to Phnom Penh, they might have grown stronger than either. The fact that the non-Communists have more political credibility than military strength argues *for* American military assistance, not against it. The purpose is not to secure a military victory by the NCR. It is to keep them strong enough to guarantee their voice in any political settlement, and to ensure a civilized choice for the Cambodian people in a free election.

The third argument is that the Khmer Rouge are still a real threat, and that the non-Communists are aligned with them. Thus American aid for the non-Communists is aiding Pol Pot indirectly. This argument has two versions. The preposterous version, which has been made by Cranston, Anthony Lewis, and others, is that any American aid for the non-Communists somehow makes its way to the Khmer Rouge. Nobody has ever produced any evidence for this assertion. And for good reason: the non-Communists are often short of supplies while the Khmer Rouge are perennially in surplus (thus Sihanouk's admission to ABC that on occasion the Khmer Rouge have provided his forces with ammunition when they had run short on the battlefield). The NCR has no rational motive to give away their scarce resources, and only monumental incompetence on the part of the Cambodia Working Group (which coordinates ASEAN and American aid to the NCR) would allow it to happen inadvertently.

The serious version of the argument is that non-Communist membership in the anti-Phnom Penh coalition is weakening the Phnom Penh government and army and thus aiding a Khmer Rouge return to power. But a Khmer Rouge military takeover is unlikely so long as Phnom Penh is being propped up by the Vietnamese army and receiving massive Soviet arms supplies. The real Khmer Rouge military aim, like that of the non-Communists, is to force Phnom Penh to accept a comprehensive political settlement such as the U.N. peace plan. It is impossible to know with any certainty why the Khmer Rouge would want to accept the peace plan. As indicated earlier, they are not converts to democratic values. However, we can speculate that either they recognize their incapacity to achieve a military victory or they have concluded that they could not secure such a victory given the likelihood of a full-scale Vietnamese reintervention. They may also believe either that they could win a free election (Pol Pot's contact with reality is not one of his strong points) or that after losing a free election they could work to undermine the new government politically or militarily. But if *our* judgment is that elections can be free and fair and the results enforceable (and the strength of the U.N. presence is crucial for that), then we should not hesitate to pursue that goal in the company of those with ulterior motives. It is, after all, the non-Communist Cambodians, who unlike us have suffered dreadfully under Pol Pot's rule, who have already made that political choice freely.

On the other hand, to end even non-lethal aid to the NCR will not end the war. It will merely deprive young Cambodian nationalists of any place to turn other than the Khmer Rouge, whose Chinese supplies will remain unaffected.

Clearly the United States does not support the return of the Khmer Rouge. The goals of U.S. policy are, or should be, to prevent the Khmer Rouge from returning to power and to enable the Cambodian people to control their own nation. Only the peace plan involving the U.N. takeover of Cambodia gives any hope of attaining either in a civilized way. A freely elected government will also have nationalist legitimacy, which Phnom Penh does not have today. Thus, although the hard-core Khmer Rouge Communists probably will try to subvert the new government, most of the Khmer Rouge soft-core support, whose motivation has been nationalistic, will no longer have any reason to follow them. The Khmer Rouge will decline from an unmanageable problem to a manageable one.

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Of course, a democratic political culture cannot be implanted in Cambodia overnight. It will take many years and enormous help from Western democracies. Yet the initial election procedure is justifiable in more pragmatic terms—as the only reasonable way to adjudicate an otherwise insoluble conflict.

Should the U.N. peace plan fail, China and the Khmer Rouge will not accept an election under Phnom Penh's auspices. Whatever Americans may wish China or the Khmer Rouge to do, both will pursue what their leaders deem to be in their interest. Given China's goal of keeping Cambodia out of Vietnam's orbit (a goal that precedes this Chinese regime), and given the question of "face," China will not capitulate to a regime installed by Vietnamese troops and Soviet arms. Thus the alternative to the U.N. plan is continuation of the war. Similarly, American acceptance of Phnom Penh would not dissuade China or the Khmer Rouge from fighting. But it would encourage Hanoi and Phnom Penh to pursue the illusion of a military victory.

Paradoxically, those who label themselves peace activists are advocating a policy that guarantees continuing war. In the "Vietnam debate" of twenty years ago, many of these same activists spoke against trying to resist the supposedly nationalist appeal of Communist revolutionaries by using a colonially tainted government. Today the trend in the world is against both colonialism and communism—and for independence and political democracy. Yet those who wish to preserve the Phnom Penh regime are proposing that the United States support a colonial Communist regime. They are thereby undermining a political mechanism that gives the only reasonable hope of independence and democracy for the Cambodian people. •

Re-election, Burmese style.

BALLOTS AND BULLETS

By Alan Berlow

"Do you genuinely love your country? Are you truly considerate of the people? And do you really want democracy? If so, walk along the flower-strewn path laid down by the Tatmadaw [the Burmese army]." —*Working People's Daily*

RANGOON

In Burma the military junta is preparing for what it calls a "multiparty democracy general election," and government officials are assuring voters that the balloting will be "free and fair." That sounds like good news for a country that has lived for the past twenty-eight years under one of Asia's most ruthless, corrupt, and retrograde dictatorships. Unfortunately, the elections on May 27—for an assembly that will write a new constitution—are sure to be an unadulterated fraud.

True, nearly a hundred political parties are expected to participate, which is progress. Theoretically, Burma is no longer a one-party state. But as one diplomat in Rangoon told me, "The military is determined to do whatever is necessary to stay in power." Although opposition parties can try to field candidates, the military junta reserves the right to veto them. Since the beginning of this year at least twenty-five opposition candidates have been arrested.

The Burmese government has not yet approved an election for a new head of state, but if one were held, Aung San Suu Kyi would win overwhelmingly. Suu Kyi is the dynamic, forty-four-year-old secretary-general of the National League for Democracy (the main opposition party) who galvanized mass demonstrations in 1988 and 1989 with her attacks on the dictatorship. Suu Kyi's enormous popularity is due in part to the fact that she is the daughter of Aung San—a man revered as the father of Burmese independence who was assassinated in 1947. She has been under house arrest since July, and she and the two other most prominent opposition leaders have been barred from participating in the election. The country's former prime minister, U Nu, is also under house arrest; Tin Oo, a former defense minister who is now chairman of the National League for Democracy, has been sentenced to three years' hard labor.

Those candidates allowed to participate in the election have been restrained by draconian regulations. Publications critical of the government are illegal, as are gatherings of more than five people without a permit. "Processions" and chanting of slogans on the way to or from political rallies are prohibited, and the text of any public speech must be approved one week in advance by government censors. Opposition parties have held few rallies, fearful that the government will provoke an incident and disqualify their candidates. When rallies have been announced, the government has sent in soldiers and riot police to discourage people from attending.

ALAN BERLOW is a free-lance reporter living in Manila.

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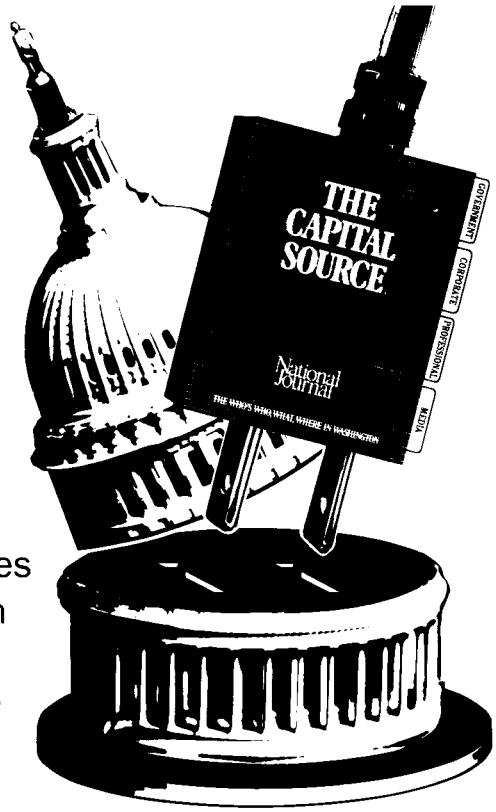

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S90C

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Scores of opposition party workers have been arrested.

The government-controlled press is filled with statements ridiculing the leading opposition parties, and although the government has given each party ten minutes of free airtime, with ninety-three parties participating voters may find it difficult to keep things straight. Candidates who survive the campaign gauntlet face the prospect of a rigged vote. Foreign observers have been refused permission to monitor the election, which will be run at the local level by the military.

The junta apparently hopes the election will buy it a measure of tranquillity at home and credibility abroad. But no one will be fooled by this farce. Even if opposition candidates are elected overwhelmingly to the constitutional assembly, they will have no authority to run the country and will merely draft a framework for a future government, which the junta could postpone indefinitely. At best, the assembly is likely to become a forum for criticizing the current regime and a focal point for future anti-government activities.

Burmese officials began talking about democracy and elections in 1988, at the same time that government troops and riot police were slaughtering demonstrators who were demanding democracy and elections. Over a seven-month period, government forces massacred an estimated 1,000 men, women, and children in Rangoon and as many as 5,000 nationwide. Highlights of the mayhem included the deaths by suffocation of forty-one protesters who were crammed into a police van for four hours and an attack on doctors and nurses treating wounded protesters at the Rangoon General Hospital.

Nearly twenty months have passed since the government crushed the nationwide pro-democracy movement. During that time people around the world have been stripping off the rags of tyrannies with Dionysian abandon. Many Burmese say the only sign of change in their country since 1988 has been the name: Burma is now officially known as "Myanmar."

In fact, life in Burma has not been stagnant. For most Burmese it has gotten worse. In the midst of the slaughter in the fall of 1988, a so-called coup d'état was staged in which the country's top leadership reorganized into the current military junta. It called itself the "State Law and Order Restoration Council." Better known by its onomatopoeic acronym as "the SLORC," the junta sounds like some bilious, dull-witted reptile. This is not far from the truth.

Since 1988 the SLORC has consolidated one of the more grotesque police states on the planet. Hundreds if not thousands of students and peasants have been forced to serve as slave laborers and "human mine sweepers" in the army's ongoing war against ethnic insurgents living at Burma's borders. The U.S. Embassy in Rangoon estimates that there were 4,000 "politically motivated arrests" last year alone. The State Department's human rights report for 1990 also held the government responsible for the torture and deaths of students, civil servants, and opposition leaders taken into custody.

Since the fall of 1988, the government has torn down thousands of homes of the country's poorest citizens in the major cities and has moved the people to new "satellite towns." According to the *Working People's Daily*, these towns are being built to provide homes to people who don't have them. Removals also have been justified on grounds of beautifying Burma's cities. But when people arrive in the new towns, they frequently find there are no buildings, water, or electricity. Typically, people are given one or two days' notice and are taken from their homes between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m., when a curfew is in effect. The timing is designed to discourage sympathetic crowds from gathering. Diplomatic sources say the government is relocating people, about 350,000 so far, to prevent them from precipitating or participating in future disturbances.

The man behind this fratricidal regime is presumed to be General Ne Win, who seized power in a military coup in 1962. In fact, the reclusive dictator's current role is somewhat obscure; he gave up all his official titles during the 1988 bloodbath and has since become almost invisible. But nearly everyone in Burma will tell you that Ne Win, "the great leader" or "number one," as people on the street ironically refer to him, is still in control.

When Ne Win came to power, the country was operating, somewhat fitfully, under a parliamentary system inherited from the British, who granted Burma independence in 1948. Ne Win immediately embarked on a program for transforming Burma called "The Burmese Road to Socialism." Burma became a one-man state ruled by an arbitrary, capricious leader who used terror and an enormous military apparatus to enforce his will. Ne Win closed his country off to the contagion of Western ideas, which he held responsible for the impoverishment of the Burmese people. He encouraged hatred of foreigners, particularly Chinese and Indians, whose property he expropriated, and he exploited prejudices against minority ethnic and religious groups. Even today, "long-nosed" and "hairy" foreigners, along with Communists, and Karen, Kachin, and other ethnic minorities, are blamed for the country's problems and held up to justify the expenditure of up to half of the country's budget on the military and an extensive police network. Indeed, the government's sole claim to authority rests on its 200,000-man military. Ne Win bought the loyalty of its officers with a generous system of perquisites (although younger officers and soldiers forced to fight the country's endless wars with ethnic insurgents are reportedly disenchanted).

To describe the dictatorship as "paranoid" would be an understatement. The *Working People's Daily* is filled with reports of Byzantine schemes to destabilize the government, many of which are traced back to events that took place thirty or forty years ago. When Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan attacked the government's stepped-up war against ethnic insurgents and students at Burma's borders, the junta responded with a nine-part series of articles that took the rebels to task for atrocities allegedly committed in 1949, and attacked the United States for bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

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The government also has produced two recent "best sellers," which purport to expose conspiracies to topple the government. (The books are sold all over Rangoon, in Burmese and English. I saw almost no other new books being sold anywhere in Burma.) *The Conspiracy of Treasonous Minions Within Myanmar and Traitorous Cohorts Abroad* describes an attempted putsch by Burmese collaborating with "rightist forces" and foreign journalists and diplomats. The book is largely a transcript of a press conference by SLORC First Secretary Khin Nyunt, who is pictured at the front of the volume, his tired, raccoonish eyes peering through wire-rimmed bifocals, looking as if he'd been up all night torturing students. The other book, *Burma Communist Party's Conspiracy to Take Over State Power*, attempts to discredit Aung San Suu Kyi and to justify the 1988 bloodbath. Here Khin Nyunt argues that Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy is dominated by Communists who exploited her in an attempt to "grab state power." One disgruntled government bureaucrat told me, "They try to blame the unrest on the Communists. They just don't understand that this was the will of the people."

Visitors to Burma often feel as if they have entered a time warp. Indeed, residents say the country's physical appearance has changed very little over the past fifty years. The cities and towns, with their thousands of Buddhas and magical animist icons, remain largely unspoiled. For a Westerner it may be pleasant to visit a country where there are no signs advertising Coca-Cola, Nike, or anything else, no high-rise condominiums, and relatively few automobiles. But the people who have to live here do not seem grateful for this crackpot brand of socialism.

Ne Win quickly turned a country rich in natural resources, a nation that had (in 1962) the most promising economy in Southeast Asia, into an economic basket case. Today per capita income in Burma is about $200 a year. Inflation is running at more than 40 percent. Although there is no widespread hunger, there were food shortages in 1988. The official economy is effectively bankrupt. The government has stopped payment to its principal creditors. There is an extensive black market, which may account for as much as 80 percent of Burma's trade, but this generates no foreign exchange for the government.

Although the country lacks trained technicians, scientists, and administrators, the junta severely restricts travel abroad, and the universities remain closed because the government fears student demonstrations more than it fears an ignorant population. Production is stymied by a lack of fuel, raw materials, and transportation, as well as a curfew that makes it impossible to move goods at night. Most foreign aid has been cut, and foreign investors remain wary of Burma because it has no coherent investment code, banking, or legal system. The government's only significant source of foreign exchange has come from the sale of oil, mineral, timber, and fishing rights to foreign (mostly Thai) companies.

Many Burmese told me they hope the United States will stage a Panama-style invasion to liberate them. This is clearly not in the cards. Neither is the hope of many students living at Burma's border with Thailand that the United States will give them guns. The United States is openly providing humanitarian assistance ($250,000) to the students, and U.S. officials both in Rangoon and in Washington have been outspoken in condemning the dictatorship. This has given some encouragement to the democratic opposition. But with no strategic or economic interest in Burma, U.S. officials pay no price for standing on the soapbox. Where words might cost something—in pressuring the Thais and the Japanese to stop doing business that prolongs the life of the junta, or in providing asylum to Burmese students—the United States has been reluctant to speak up. In Thailand, Burmese students are under constant threat of arrest and deportation. Some of the students deported to Burma in 1988 were reportedly murdered by the government. The United States has provided sanctuary to Chinese students in a similar predicament, but it has been slow to act on behalf of the Burmese.

In the long run, however, Burma is not a problem that Uncle Sam can solve. In 1988 millions of Burmese took to the streets to demand "democracy." Many had little idea what that meant, other than an end to an asphyxiating tyranny. They courageously persisted in their demand despite relentless government brutality, and they almost succeeded. Following the crackdown, thousands of students and professionals fled to Burma's borders, where they joined ethnic Karen, Mon, Kachin, and other rebels who have been at war with the Rangoon government for forty years. But during the past year the rebels and the students have suffered one defeat after another at the hands of the Burmese military. They stand no chance of toppling the dictatorship.

Nevertheless, the opposition has scored several important victories. In 1988 *every* segment of Burmese society joined in the anti-government protests, demonstrating that virtually the entire population loathes the dictatorship. This was a healthy beginning. Since then the opposition has recognized, for the first time in Burmese history, that there is a confluence of interests between the ethnic minorities living in the hinterlands and the students and other pro-democracy forces in the cities. Each of these groups is demanding democracy, free elections, and a federal system that protects minority interests. Taken together, these groups represent a broad-based alternative to the dictatorship.

In 1986 the Philippine military ousted Ferdinand Marcos after he rigged a presidential election. Last year the Romanian military revolted after Nicolae Ceausescu's security force murdered hundreds of protesters demanding democracy. Many Burmese hope that their election, a broad-based public response to the anticipated fraud, or another government-ordered bloodbath will incite the military to put an end to Burma's tyranny. It is ironic that many Burmese now look to the military, which so wantonly slaughtered civilians in 1988, as their last hope. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Tales of Two Cities

Anyone who has seen an American play in a foreign theater has probably observed that they never get the American aspects quite right. The settings, the costumes, the mannerisms may be earnestly imitative but are never quite the real thing. Now here's a film example, all the more odd because it was shot in Brooklyn with American actors and the screen adaptation—of the Hubert Selby Jr. novel—was made by an American. But **Last Exit to Brooklyn** (Cinecom) was produced and directed by Germans, Bernd Eichinger and Uli Edel, and the result is ponderously synthetic.

Selby's novel—about Brooklyn factory workers, their wives and women, their saloons, the male and female prostitutes who hang around—is as sulphurous a chunk of naturalism as American fiction can vaunt. It's not a novel, really, but a series of stories related atmospherically, stylistically, and otherwise. Desmond Nakano, who did the screenplay, interwove the separate stories with modest skill and strove to reproduce the fire-hydrant flood of Selby's prose. Some touches of neatness and sentimentality obtrude, as at the end of the gang-bang sequence with the prostitute, Tralala, but Nakano's script could have been filmed with some credibility. Others supplied the phoniness.

If Selby's book is something like a blend of Gorky, early Dos Passos, and Céline, the texture of the film is something like "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue," the famous gangster ballet in *On Your Toes* (1936). Every bit of scenery, every costume, every lighting effect is so prettily hideous that at any moment, we expect Richard Rodgers's music to start and the proles and molls to dance à la Balanchine.

But the biggest fault with the film is that it exists. The book was published in 1964, somewhat late even then for the kind of writing that lives chiefly by its gutsiness, yet it was so fierce that it could still claim attention. The film seems hopelessly dated. The more it insists on its fearlessness, the more dated it seems. Some of the material is literally dated, like the profusion of soldiers and sailors on leave. But, for instance, the factory workers' strike, the battle with the scab truckers, the strikers' revenge—though they certainly could occur today—look dated because the picture seems to think that it's searing us with truths we have been hiding from.

One episode is intrinsically moving, the section that struck me hardest when I first read the book; Selby called it "Strike." Nakano moves the strike backward and forward so that it envelops all the action, but that doesn't hurt this story. The factory strike gives a worker named Harry Black, a hard-drinking, rough-tough fellow with a wife and baby, both the leisure and the opportunity to discover that he is bisexual, a discovery that first dazzles and subsequently dismays him. This episode is the closest that the film and the book come to insight.

Stephen Lang, now on Broadway in *A Few Good Men*, plays Harry sincerely but stolidly, a well-meant performance devoid of nuance. Burt Young, familiar from the Rocky pictures, is like an item on the menu of a restaurant one has visited too often: the flavor is expected and overfamiliar. Jerry Orbach is more authentic than usual as a union boss. Jennifer Jason Leigh plays Tralala inauthentically. In the current *Miami Blues*, Leigh is a present-day Florida call girl and makes the woman pathetically true. As Tralala—who is prettier here than Selby says she is—Leigh carries on like a well-bred college girl playing a cheap hooker on the basis of films she has seen about cheap hookers.

The success, or at least the notoriety, of Peter Greenaway's latest film, *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*, has prompted the release of one of the films he made between *The Draughtsman's Contract* and the new one. **The Belly of an Architect** (Hemdale) was done in 1987, and its release adds to the puzzlements of Greenaway's career.

Because he has established himself as an intelligence and as a visual connoisseur, we look in his films for intelligent reason to support their visual being. This time, with Sacha Vierny again as his cinematographer, we can be sure that our eyes will feast, and the assurance is double because the setting is Rome. Greenaway and Vierny find ways to see the city that simultaneously remind us of what we know yet present it in new perspectives, new baths of light. A series of color stills from this film would be a poor present to give some-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Longtime Companion. *A group of New York gays between 1981 and 1989, as AIDS arrives and brutalizes their lives. Honest and touching. (Reviewed 5/28/90)* **The Mahabharata.** *The chance to see a true acting ensemble, working in poetic scale—in Peter Brook's three-hour version of his nine-hour theater version of the Indian classic. (5/7/90)* **Q & A.** *Nick Nolte, Armand Assante, Lee Richardson, and other notable actors in a police-drug-corruption story that gives Sidney Lumet another chance to explore New York. The script sometimes stumbles, but the texture is fine. (5/21/90)* **Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!** *Audacious Pedro Almodóvar this time makes us care about the romance between an ex-mental patient and the porno star he kidnaps. Madrid melts. (5/14/90)* **—SK**

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one who is going to Rome for the first time because he or she is unlikely to see it in this innovative way.

But what, I must ask as I did about *The Cook*, is it all for? The later film labors an obvious allegory about appetites and cruelties. I can't say that this earlier one is equally obvious, it's just vacant. Food, as the title suggests, once again is important: feastings of various kinds recur. Sexual appetite, too, is again present. But wherefore?

The architect is an American in his fifties. (The character's name is Stourley—pronounced Stoorly—Kracklite. Not exactly a name to conjure with.) He comes to Rome with his young wife to mount an exhibition of the work of Etienne-Louis Boullée, the eighteenth-century French architect who is his idol. Boullée's abstract, geometrical clarity is supposed to have some resonance in the film, undetected by me. During the months in which the exhibition is being prepared, the architect develops abdominal pains, which are ultimately diagnosed as stomach cancer. During the same months he and his wife have differences, and she welcomes the advances of a quasi-professional Italian seducer. The latter has a sophisticated sister with whom he has a bizarre relationship—you know those Europeans—and the sister sets her cap (I euphemize) for the architect. All these ideas are meant to build to a tragic-ironic climax, but absolutely nothing is accomplished in this film other than a series of posings and of doughy dialogues in the middle of beautiful pictures.

Brian Dennehy, an American version of Sean Connery's Mr. Hearty, is the architect, and struggles to make a human being out of a concoction, but he is doomed. The wife is Chloe Webb, so affecting as Nancy in *Sid and Nancy*, who here is out of place and class. Lambert Wilson plays the European seducer of an American wife as an up-to-date version of what Erich von Stroheim did in *Blind Husbands* (1919), *The Devil's Pass Key* (1920), and *Foolish Wives* (1922).

Generalizations about Greenaway must be tentative because so much of his work is unknown here—numerous shorts and two other features. But, on the evidence so far, it seems that *The Draughtsman's Contract* was a stroke of luck. This is not to deny his brains and talent, only to note that, a painter by training and a painter still, Greenaway's films seem another form of painterly expression, "justified" by allegorical plot schemes that he hopes will rise to the level of his visual art. Only once so far, with *The Draughtsman*, has his screenplay been as good as his eye. He needs advice, to keep him from wasting his sure talent on his unsure one. •

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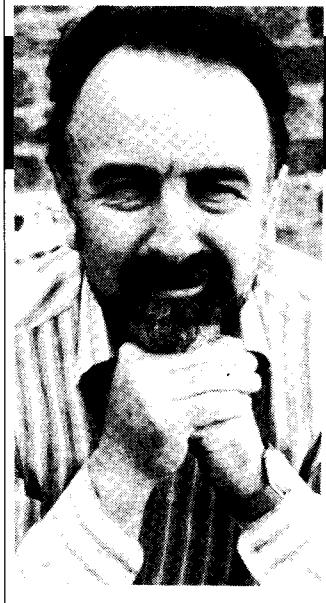

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Late justice for one of modernism's victims.

Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf

By Irving Howe

Literary polemics come and go, sparking a season of anger and gossip, and then turning to dust. A handful survive their moment: Dr. Johnson's demolition of Soames Jenyn, Hazlitt's attack on Coleridge. But few literary polemics can have been so damaging, or so lasting in consequences, as Virginia Woolf's 1924 essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," about the once widely read English novelists Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and John Galsworthy. For several literary generations now, Woolf's essay has been taken as the definitive word finishing off an old-fashioned school of fiction and thereby clearing the way for literary modernism. Writing with her glistening charm, and casting herself as the voice of the new (always a shrewd strategy in literary debate), Woolf quickly seized the high ground in her battle with Bennett. Against her needling thrusts, the old fellow never had a chance.

The debate has been nicely laid out by Samuel Hynes in *Edwardian Occasions*, and I owe to him some of the following details. It all began in 1917, with Woolf's review of a collection of Bennett's literary pieces, a rather favorable review marred by the stylish snobbism that was becoming a trademark of the Bloomsbury circle. Bennett, wrote Woolf, had a materialistic view of the world, "he had been worrying himself to achieve infantile realisms." A catchy phrase, though exactly what "infantile realisms" meant Woolf did not trouble to say. During the next few years she kept returning to the attack, as if to prepare for "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." More than personal sensibilities or rivalries of status was involved here, though both were quite visible; Woolf was intent upon discrediting, if not simply dismissing, a group of literary predecessors who enjoyed a large readership.

In 1923 Bennett reviewed Woolf's novel *Jacob's Room*, praising its "originality" and "exquisite" prose but concluding that "the characters do not vitally survive in the mind." For Bennett, this was a fatal flaw. And for his readers, too—though not for the advanced literary public that by now was learning to suspect this kind of talk about "characters surviving" as a lazy apology for the shapeless and perhaps even mindless Victorian novel.

A year later Woolf published her famous essay, brilliantly sketching an imaginary old lady named Mrs. Brown whom she supplied with anecdotes and reflections as tokens of inner being. These released the sort of insights, suggested Woolf, that would not occur to someone like Bennett, a writer obsessed with dull particulars of setting (weather, town, clothing, furniture, and so on). Were Bennett to write about a Mrs. Brown, he would describe her house in conscientious detail but never penetrate her essential life, for—what a keen polemicist!—"he is trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there." (Herself sensitive to the need for a room with a view, Woolf seemed indifferent to what a house might mean for people who had risen somewhat in the world. For a writer like Bennett, however, imagining a house was part of the way to locate "a person living there.") And in a quiet put-down of Bennett's novel *Hilda Lessways* (not one of his best), Woolf gave a turn of the knife: "One line of insight would have done more than all those lines of description."

From the suave but deadly attack of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" Bennett's literary reputation never quite recovered. He remained popular with the general public, but among literary readers, the sort that became the public for the emerging modernists, the standard view has long been that he was a middling, plodding sort of Edwardian writer whose work has been pushed aside by the revolutionary achievements of Lawrence, Joyce, and to a smaller extent Woolf herself.

When Bennett died in 1930, Woolf noted in her diary that "he had some real understanding power, as well as a gigantic absorbing power [and] direct contact with life"—all attributes, you might suppose, handy for a novelist but for her evidently not sufficient. In saying this, remarks Hynes, "Woolf gave Bennett, perhaps, the 'reality gift' that [she] doubted in herself, the gift that she despised and envied." Yes; in much of her fiction Woolf resembles Stevens's man with the blue guitar who "cannot bring a world quite round / Although I patch it as I can." Still, none of this kept Woolf from steadily sniping at Bennett's "shopkeeping view of literature." Bennett was a provincial from the Five Towns; Bennett was commercially successful; Bennett was an elder to be pulled down, as elders must always be pulled down even if they are also admired a little.

Through more than a decade of their guerrilla encounters, Bennett tried to parry Woolf's attacks, but as a polemicist he was sadly outclassed. (Hynes writes in a personal letter that Bennett was a poor polemicist "because he was simply too *nice*.") In 1920 Bennett made a fatal tactical blunder: he wrote in *The Evening Standard*, a London paper, that Woolf is "the queen of the high brows; and I am a low brow." Now this may have tickled his readers, but among the literary people who would be making and unmaking reputations it was the equivalent of shooting himself in the foot—for one mark of the modern era has been a ready celebration of the high against the low brow. Though Bennett wasn't really a low brow, he had been baited by Woolf into a truculent misrepresentation of himself. Years earlier he had written in his journal that "we have absorbed from France that passion for artistic shapely presentation of truth, and the feeling for words as words, which animated Flaubert, the de Goncourts, and de Maupassant." Hardly the sentiments of a low brow. And in one or two of his novels Bennett would himself write in accord with the word "from France."

Feelings of class, always abrasive in England, also figured in this dispute, and again Bennett was outmaneuvered. Woolf attacked from both sides, first as a patrician looking down a prominent nose at the grubby lower middle class of the provinces and then as a free spirit elegantly bohemian and contemptuous of shopkeeper mentality. Bennett couldn't even salvage for himself the doubtful advantage of claiming he was a sturdy proletarian: his father had been a solicitor in the Five Towns. And, in the 1920s, to be called a "shopkeeper's novelist" meant being thrust into philistine darkness.

Bennett and Woolf, writes Hynes, were "*not* antithetical in their views of their common art." After all, Bennett had shown respect for new writing, had

Irving Howe is at work on a book about the novel titled *Selected Short Subjects*.

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praised Dostoyevsky and Chekhov when the Russians were translated into English, had declared admiration for the "conscious art." What had actually happened, I think, was that Bennett had allowed feelings of class inferiority—they persisted despite his success, his yacht, his mistress—to shift to the arena of cultural judgment, and Woolf had been quick to take advantage of this confusion.

Still, Hynes may be overstating the case a little when he sees nothing "antithetical in their views of their common art." There really was a serious clash regarding "their common art," and at one point in her essay Woolf made clear what the issue was. Older writers like Bennett and Wells were using one set of "conventions"—that's the key word—while younger writers found these to be "ruin . . . death." The "Edwardian tools," she said, "have laid an enormous stress on the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there." Or to put it in other words: the Edwardian novelists believed that human nature could be revealed by rendering conduct and circumstance—"from the outside," as some critics would say.

In one of her objective moments, Woolf admitted that "the tools of one generation are useless for the next." What was consequently involved in her clash with Bennett was not the superiority of one set of fictional conventions over another—it's very doubtful that such superiority can ever be demonstrated—but rather that two generations had reached a fundamental division over the kinds of novels to be written. Outside/inside, objective/subjective, social/psychological: let these stand as rough tokens of the division. Where Woolf gained a polemical advantage was in claiming, or at least arguing as if, there was something inherently better about the novel of sensibility as against the novel of circumstance. She didn't yet have to consider that in a while the new becomes old, giving way soon enough to the still newer new.

But what I've just said is not the most important point. True, Woolf was using her self-chosen role as advocate of the new in order to undermine Bennett, but she was also doing something else. She was writing in behalf of a great new cultural impulse, that of literary modernism. By 1924, if it had not yet entirely triumphed, this impulse was certainly well on the way to triumph, and in retrospect Woolf's essay seems less the outcry of a beleaguered minority than evidence that this minority was consolidating its cultural power. An attendant irony is that while Woolf spoke for the new and had a certain right to do so, she was unfriendly to, indeed rather obtuse about, the great modernists: she found Joyce "indecent" and Eliot "obscure."

So Woolf won the battle, if not perhaps the argument. I remember several decades ago being informed by authoritative literary persons that Woolf had demolished Bennett *once and for all*. Growing older, I have come to recognize that "once and for all" often means no more than a few decades. By the end of our century, literary modernism has settled comfortably into the academy; there is no longer a need to defend it against detractors, and one might even look back upon it with a critical eye. The deeper issue, then, wasn't really, as both Woolf and Bennett said, which writer could create more persuasive characters; it was a clash over competing versions of the novel as a form. Such clashes are never fully settled, they keep recurring in new ways.

Matters become still more complicated if we glance at the novels that Bennett and Woolf wrote. At least one of Woolf's novels is greatly to be admired, and that is *To the Lighthouse*, where in her own fragile and iridescent way she does command "the reality gift." But Woolf's reputation needs no defense these days; it has been inflated for reasons having little to do with her work as a novelist. What does need to be said is that Bennett still merits attention as a fine, largely traditional novelist in a few of his books (he wrote too many): *Anna of the Five Towns*, *The Old Wives' Tale*, *Clayhanger*, *Riceyman Steps*.

Bennett's prose is often slapdash and flavorless, quite without Woolf's felicity of phrasing; his psychology is intuitively bluff rather than precisely nuanced; his technique often lags and stumbles. Yet he had the true novelist's gift, what Woolf called "a gigantic absorbing power," or what the Russian critic Bakhtin meant when he wrote that "for the prose artist the world is full of the words of other people." Bennett listened to those words, recording through them the lives of ordinary people with what he once marvelously called a "crushed tenderness."

In his novels there is a strongly realized sense of place—those cramped dingy towns of provincial England, bristling with high aspirations, streaked with meanness of spirit. Place, not as a Hardyesque rising to spiritual transcendence, but confined, local, the corner of a province. In *Clayhanger*, a modest classic in the subgenre of the bildungsroman, Bennett faithfully charts the yearnings

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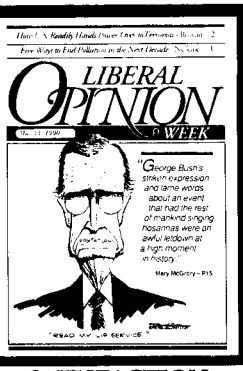

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for emotional articulation of a printer's son in the Five Towns ("a new conception of himself"). He depicts the homely, almost speechless love of middle-aged, middle-class men and women with a stolid respect, if not the flair of Woolf or the depth of Lawrence. Bennett is a master of the middle range of life and literature, neither soarings of sublimity nor plunges into the soul. He is indeed the prosing poet of the shopkeepers (who may also deserve a poet of their own).

Riceyman Steps, published in 1923, late in Bennett's career, is something else again, a tour de force, Flaubertian in its stringent organization but with moments of Balzacian power. In a style somewhat unnervingly detached, this short novel depicts the lives of shopkeepers trapped in miserliness, showing not only the predictable psychic costs but also how self-denial can become a twisted expression of the life force. Here is the kind of passage that leads one to invoke Balzac; it describes a moment when the shopkeeper protagonist is at the height of his obsession:

> He took a third drawer out of the safe, lifting it with both hands because of its weight, and put it on the table. It was full of gold sovereigns. Violet [his wife] had never seen this gold before nor suspected its existence. She was astounded, frightened, ravished. He must have kept it throughout the war, defying the government's appeal to patriots not to hoard. He was a superman, the most mysterious of supermen. And he was a fortress, impregnable.

It is as if Bennett, in writing this austere novel, had taken to heart—more likely, had tried to overcome his irritation with—Henry James's attack on *Clayhanger* in 1914, in an essay called "The New Novel." While James could on occasion be sympathetic to novelists working from premises different from his own, finally his critical judgments reflected a stringent bias. Bennett's *Clayhanger*, he wrote, was notable for its detailed representation, evoking, as we say, a recognizable "world," but the novel lacked the strategic maneuvers of high art, that conscious "treatment" that only a true artist could manage. As James put it: Bennett provides "the circumstances of the [novel's] interest—we see, we see; but where is the interest itself?" This criticism, anticipating (though more generous than) Woolf's attack, might have been answered by Bennett, had he been capable of a critical answer, in this way: "If as you so kindly say, my dear James, I have succeeded in providing the 'circumstances' of my fiction, then the 'interest' is likely to be there also, as an inherent element that gradually emerges out of the 'circumstances,' so that you see, you see."

In writing *Riceyman Steps*, Bennett seemed intent upon showing that he, too, could produce a tightly formed and integrated fiction. This minor masterpiece is highly "composed," artful and economical, not only focusing upon a few closely related and intensely observed characters but also realizing an "interest"—which can be either a matter of structure or of theme, or better still, both. Toward the end of his career, Bennett had achieved that fusion of theme and technique that modern criticism has made into a supreme object of literature, that is, the "art novel" with all its Flaubertian tightness of form. And the form has a certain approximate relation to what I take to be Bennett's theme in *Riceyman Steps*: obsession as multiplicity, a power that not only destroys but, astonishingly, also releases the energies of life.

Finally, however, even an admirer of Bennett must admit that there is something in his work—some strand of feeling or aspiration—that is thwarted, unfulfilled. In all his novels except *Riceyman Steps*, the life of the narrative has a way of gradually draining out, as if creation were also a mode of exhaustion. A costive heaviness sets in. Why should this be? Perhaps because there is some truth in the idea that the kind of Victorian novel inherited by Bennett and the other Edwardians had reached what might be called the routinization of realism. And Bennett, a latecomer in the development of the English novel, lacked those mad outpourings of energy that mark the greatest of the Victorians. At moments a touch of modern sadness seeps into his soul, some grim deprivation bred in provincial life.

Something like this may have been what Lawrence had in mind when he wrote: "I hate Bennett's resignation. Tragedy ought really to be a great kick at misery." Bennett himself seems occasionally to have had similar responses to his own work, though in a fine essay about George Gissing he provided a justification for its grayness of tone. Gissing, he said, "is . . . just, sober, calm, and proud against the gods; he has seen, he knows, he is unmoved: he defeats fate by accepting it." Whether this quite disposes of Lawrence's criticism is a question, though I'd venture the opinion that Lawrence's attack cut more deeply and painfully than Woolf's, even though it is Woolf's that has been remembered.

The years pass, and by now the dispute between Bennett and Woolf has settled into history. It may be time for a spot of justice for Arnold Bennett, not a great but at times a very good novelist. But I doubt that it will come, since it's a delusion to suppose that the passage of time is an aid to justice, and in any case there hovers over Bennett's work and reputation the shadow of the formidable Mrs. Brown, called into being by the silkily ferocious Mrs. Woolf. •

Cannot Be A Tourist

Not casually. Within two days
Streets and vista are mine forever,
Some last few wisps of jet lag clearing
As senses expand to occupy
A space already second nature.

How many facts, though, work against
Staying put. A rented house;
An unknown language stumbled over;
Formal obligations, debts,
In taut suspense back where we vote.

Brought home so often, still the dried
Pages of the journal are more
Compelling than they have a right,
Much reasonable right, to be.
Only alight on them and now

Ancestor olives near Delphi
Stand in an oddly youthful trance;
The vines outside Siena, leaf
By jagged, gold-veined, classic leaf,
Outline the sun in a dust of earth;

Bronze, coal-green, the Haitian bantam
Stalks a wall spilled over with red
Bougainvillea; or Quai Voltaire's
Streaked pediment enshrines a crush
Of half-nude marble, artist-cohorts

Living it up in their garret (the Seine
By night, each lamp secreted in oyster
Mist). . . . Facts be damned: some part follows
Hereafter and continues. At home
Where the heart enlarged by affection is,

Whoever could not be a tourist
Closes the door pro forma only—
Aware, even so, that form's good practice
For firm conclusions, holding steady
When time says, "Bid the earth farewell."

ALFRED CORN

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Getting it all wrong.

The Years of Robert Caro

BY SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL

I.

Hundreds of pages before Coke Stevenson, the governor of Texas, first sets one boot in front of the other, on a dusty, deserted street in Alice, Texas, walking toward the gunslingers that he believed rustled the 1948 Senate election for Lyndon Johnson, he had already been transformed into legend. His apotheosis occurred the moment Robert Caro raised the curtain on him. The scene is pitch black, in the "vast and empty Hill Country," utterly desolate except for a campfire, around which there sits a teenager, who has been working a lonely trail carrying freight, a task too forbidding for older men. The boy is the young Coke, a child of rural poverty, studying textbooks on bookkeeping:

> And if that scene—the single circle of light in the dark and empty hills; the boy within that circle, studying to get ahead; the courage and ambition which had brought the boy out into the emptiness—symbolizes the legend of the West, so, indeed, Coke Stevenson's whole life was the raw material out of which that legend is made.

Thus we learn that the legend is no legend at all; it is nothing less than the true story of the Old West. Caro invites his readers to put aside their sophistication and their cynicism as he draws them into a fully imagined world of the past, where the fabulous was real, when a man known as "Mr. Texas" rode the purple sage and ran for the Senate against Lyndon Johnson.

For Caro, the frontier is an enchanted wilderness—the state of nature where the American character is always rejuvenated. Coke Stevenson is the Leatherstocking as Jeffersonian, the frontiersman as democrat. His closeness to the land builds his body and his spirit. He is more authentic than the others in the political arena, the "plain old Adam, the simple genuine self against the whole world," as Emerson described the ideal American. Everything about Stevenson is self-made, unflawed by his modernizing and corrupting society; he is a self-made banker, rancher, politician, architect. He does not seek public office, it seeks him. He designs and builds his own house in the Hill Country, carrying every stone for the fireplace from a ridge miles away. The house is a "refuge from the world," lacks a telephone, fitting perfectly into nature.

All around Stevenson in Austin are fallen men, creatures of the "Three Bs" (beefsteak, bourbon, and blondes). Stevenson was "an unusual figure against this backdrop . . . more silent than ever," yet he was accorded respectful deference because his shining virtues were instantly recognized. The quality of this Natty Bumppo of the legislature that was particularly apparent was his piety. "He read the two constitutions (state and federal)—and took their words—as literally as he read his Bible, and his reverence was no less deep."

The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent
by Robert A. Caro
(Knopf, 506 pp., $24.95)

His cultural primitivism attested to his authenticity, his lack of complexity was proof of his purity. His whole frontier experience led him to believe that the government that governed best, governed least. "The philosophy embodied in the Texas Constitution dovetailed with the philosophy of the man who studied it in the light of a predawn fire in his ranch house by the South Llano; its character was his." Coke embodied land and liberty. In spite of his own lack of political ambition, politicians prevailed on him time and again to run for office, and the voters kept raising him to higher and higher positions, from legislator to Speaker of the House, from lieutenant governor to governor. "He made Texans remember why they were proud of being Texans." Criticism by rivals and carping journalists did not stick because, to Texans, "Coke Stevenson was not a politician but a hero."

Coke accepted the acclaim of Texas on Fourth of July weekend, 1948, at the Texas Cowboy Reunion, where he led the parade of riders, behind the Stars and Stripes and the Lone Star flag. "He was riding 'Pal,' a big, magnificently muscled palomino, but Stevenson, with his great shoulders and the erectness with which he held himself in the saddle, seemed almost too big for him." As he passed by, "it seemed" that every man greeted him with "a cowboy gesture, a peculiarly Texas gesture," touching their fingers to their Stetson brims and pointing to him, a "sign of respect" made by the old men and the "sons and grandsons of the old ranchmen" whose "fathers and grandfathers had told them the story of Coke Stevenson," who had "never become a politician, had never betrayed his standards, which were, of course, their standards, too . . . their beloved 'Cowboy Governor'—their own Governor."

But a hero cannot be truly heroic, of course, unless he proves himself in combat with an antihero. The frontiersman in harmony with the woods must defend his simple, noble creed against the outlaw. Against the good of the West, there stood the evil of the West, the dark side of individualism and liberty, that obeys no law and seeks to destroy the frontier idyll in connivance with the city slickers, who breathe contempt for the innocence and the decency of the common folk. Enter Lyndon Johnson. In *Means of Ascent*, Caro has created a black-hatted villain more dastardly than any ever imagined by Zane Grey or Louis L'Amour.

As the curtain rises on Johnson, he has lost an election for the Senate. It was an election that he tried to steal. His deepest motive in life was not to seem like his "idealistic, romantic, rigidly honest" father, Sam Ealy Johnson, a state legislator who had failed at business. Thus Lyndon's climb was marked at every point, according to Caro, by a compulsive "stealing of elections." In his 1941 campaign, he pledged that if war came he would leave Congress to join "your boys." War came, and the congressman implored his benefactor in the White House for an important appointment in Washington.

The appointment was not forthcoming, and finally Johnson gained an assignment as a liaison and observer for the Navy. He had been a physical coward since childhood, but in the South Pacific he joined an air squadron for a bombing raid against a Japanese base. His plane came under enemy fire, an attack during which he behaved coolly and calmly. He was awarded a Silver Star. Caro is not overly impressed. Over time, he reports, the incident became more awesome in Johnson's telling of it, and his role inflated to the point where he claimed the other men had referred to him as "Raider" Johnson. This was an early "credibility gap."

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Back in the States, Johnson gained control of a radio station in Austin by hook and by crook, and it became the basis of his considerable fortune. His assertion that the station belonged to his wife and that he had no involvement with it was a ruse. Lady Bird, a painfully shy and self-conscious young woman, was a special target of the personal abuse that all who were close to the monstrous Johnson received at one time. He treated her like a servant, berated her physical appearance before their friends ("You look so muley, Bird"), abandoned her on weekends for his wealthy mistress, while she learned the skills required to manage his congressional office when he was on his naval assignment.

Johnson's decision to run again for the Senate in 1948 was a huge gamble; if he failed, his political career would be over. His will to power was almost superhuman, in Caro's account: he campaigned even when a kidney stone induced fevers, sweats, and vomiting, and then campaigned harder to make up for time lost in the Mayo Clinic. His campaign was like a fever itself, driven by demonic energy, even lifting him airborne in an infernal machine—"The Flying Windmill," a helicopter carrying him from small town to small town, where such a device had never before been seen and drew gawking crowds. "Hello, down there," boomed the candidate, from the sky. "This is your friend, Lyndon Johnson." It was the machine in the garden, a contraption that intruded upon the bucolic setting where Stevenson was campaigning the old-fashioned way, from courthouse to courthouse, shaking hands man to man, riding horses and sawing logs.

Johnson, the former Roosevelt man, was so diabolically possessed with his own ambition that he made a Mephistophelean alliance with the reactionary business establishment and veered sharply to the right. He struck an even more devilish deal with George Parr, the corrupt "Duke of Duval," who controlled the votes of large sections of south Texas. In Alice, in Jim Wells County, Ballot Box 13 (controlled by Parr's pistoleros) was withheld on election night until the outcome became apparent. Then its tallies gave Johnson an eighty-seven-vote victory.

And so Coke Stevenson, accompanied by his old friend Frank Hamer—he was "even more legendary," the Texas Ranger who ambushed Bonnie and Clyde—walked down the proverbial dusty street, with Hamer's right hand "poised just above the butt of his gun, his fingers curled for the draw." But Stevenson, unlike Gary Cooper, was thwarted. He was not given the tally sheet for Box 13. Johnson's connections among the sybarites and sophisticates of the capital came into play. "Facing a Gordian knot of seemingly insoluble legal complications, Lyndon Johnson reached for his sharpest tool of all."

That "tool" was not a six-shooter, but Abe Fortas, the "most brilliant legal mind ever to come out of the Yale Law School," a New Dealer who had become one of the most influential attorneys in Washington. Fortas's gift was for the clever manipulation of abstractions (an artificial quality that, in Caro's rendering, had no relationship to character). Bringing to bear the cosmopolitan Fortas was ultimately what allowed Johnson to triumph over Stevenson's "Jeffersonian" principles. The outcome was a victory of the counterfeit over the true, the inauthentic over the natural, the modern over the traditional, the politician over the citizen, the city over the country, the dark over the light. Once upon a time in the West . . .

That is not the only legend implicated in Robert Caro's book. Once upon a time in the East . . . there was the legend of Robert Caro. And it is on that legend that the story in *Means of Ascent*, and its astonishing success, finally rests. It was born in 1974, when a former *Newsday* reporter's tome on Robert Moses was published and won the Pulitzer Prize. Then, at the age of thirty-nine, Caro began his biography on an even greater practitioner of power, Lyndon Johnson, a project that has consumed fifteen years and produced two volumes that have carried its subject only to the doors of the Senate. The next two volumes of *The Years of Lyndon Johnson* may perhaps occupy another fifteen of the years of Robert Caro. He is as obsessive as Ahab in pursuing his quarry, though his whale is not white—as obsessive as Johnson in his own pursuit of power.

The heart of the Caro legend is his "genius" for finding and delivering the complete truth. This "genius" is the result of a preternatural investigative energy. In each of his books, Caro is said to have interviewed more witnesses and exhumed more archives than anyone else who ever went near the subject. Caro's wife, too, is a part of this authorial legend, selflessly dedicating herself to his work for four years in Texas, burrowing in countless libraries, slowly sifting through hundreds of boxes of Johnson's papers: "What she is interested in is the truth," writes Caro in tribute.

What does Caro mean by "truth"? He appears to mean the unparalleled and comprehensive accumulation of facts. Caro must be the greatest positivist in America. The swarm of particulars in his possession are what invests him with powers of mythic explanation and moral judgment. And the sheer quantity of his facts is what gives his work its aura of unassailable authority. (Martin Gilbert's many volumes on Churchill come to mind, but Gilbert doesn't pretend to anything more than a full record of what can be known.) One may dispute Caro's interpretation, but not his method, because his method is, well, omniscience. It is not hard for Caro, therefore, to overwhelm his critics with his amassed detail. "I did the thing he didn't do," he told *The New York Times* about a recent critic. "I did the work."

But Caro's legend poses a danger to his work. For he has staked everything on his encyclopedic mastery of his sources, on having penetrated every corner. "I'm bringing out information that's really shocking and new so the first response is always disbelief," he said to *The Washington Post*. But what if there are corners that Caro has not penetrated? What if there are sources that he does not know, particulars that rearrange the light and the shadows on all his subjects? What, then, of Caro's famous facts, of his authority as a biographer?

II.

"I was Coke's secretary for a few legislative sessions," says Mark Adams, who lives in Washington state. Adams was a young newspaperman from Kilgore, Texas, when he went to work for the Speaker of the House in Texas in 1934. Though he was active in liberal politics in Texas, after a stint as a New Dealer in Washington, he supported Stevenson against Johnson in 1948, and he "remained Coke's friend throughout his life." Adams is cited as a source in *The Politician*, Ronnie Dugger's 1982 biography of Johnson. Caro never interviewed him.

Stevenson's former secretary remembers rumors that, like Speakers of the House before him, Stevenson accepted money from the oil and gas companies in exchange for leases that were never acted upon. Adams recalls:

> They would have executed a lease form so that it would seem a legitimate transaction rather than a bribe or campaign contribution. I don't see that there would be any reason to register them. Oil and gas didn't have anything to do with it. It was just to launder the money. A record would be an embarrassment to everybody. . . . It would have been totally untypical of Coke if there had been a record. He had a frontier idea of handshake deals, your word is good and so on, a very keen sense of privacy. You don't even inquire about your friends. You don't pry into their affairs.

In any case, says Adams, the notion that an oil company might actually drill on

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Stevenson's ranch was ludicrous. "That was the poorest oil prospecting land in the world," he maintains.

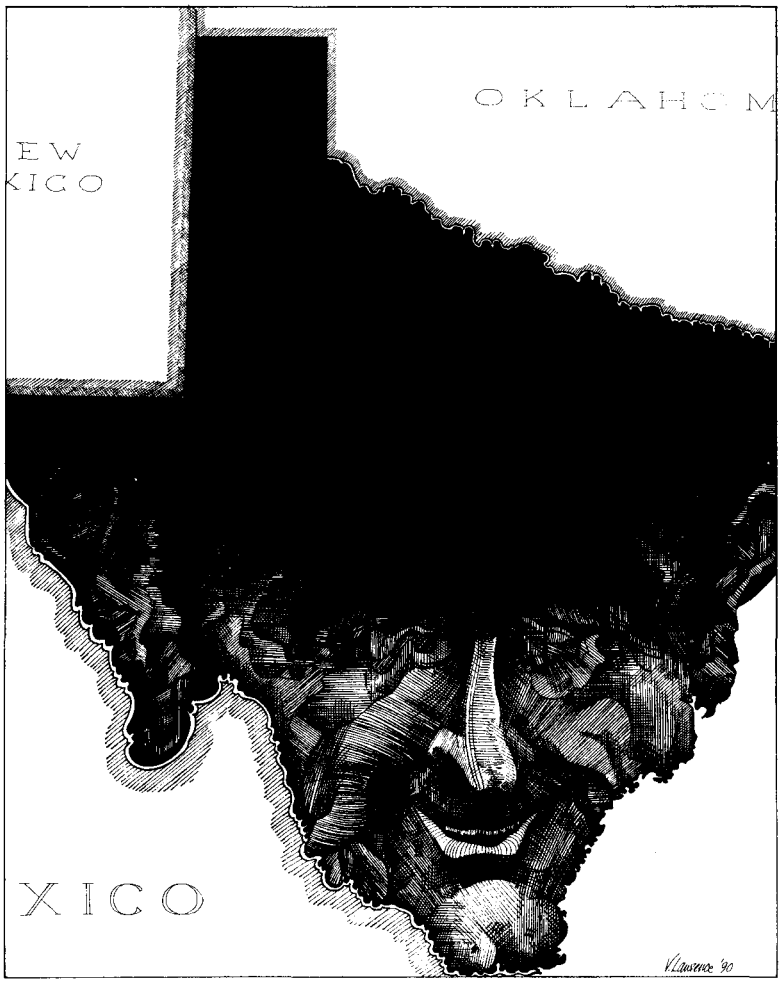
Adams remembers more about Caro's hero of Texas. One afternoon Stevenson and a lobbyist

> came out of his office and into the anteroom where my desk was. They talked about a deal about sheep. The number being sold kept changing and the price kept changing. I sat there in total silence and wondered why they wanted a witness. They could have talked in the utter privacy of the office. The final figure they came out on was $75,000. At the time the discussion I had heard didn't make sense, the number of sheep being sold, the price changing, finally settling on the round figure. I just assumed that they wanted a witness to the fact that this was a sheep deal if they ever needed one.

The sheep in question never materialized. Later, though, Adams heard of "an oil deal that involved about $75,000." Then, he says, "I thought I could guess why these two men came out of the inner office into this less comfortable anteroom to strike a 'sheep' deal."

Adams does not remember these events with indignation. This was, instead, just Texas business as usual:

> I don't have any doubts that he [Stevenson] took the money. I completely doubt that it changed his attitude or vote. It wasn't a quid pro quo. It was part of the spectacle of how things went on. . . . I never said anything to Coke. I didn't mutter a word, even though there we were. I never asked him about it later. Again, you'll understand, I didn't even wonder.



LYNDON JOHNSON BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Now, the testimony of Adams, his certainty about what he saw, does not prove absolutely that Stevenson was a crook. Adams offers circumstantial—first-hand and credible circumstantial—evidence. What matters, rather, is the unillusioned image of Stevenson that informs his former secretary's recollections. And Adams's story is not some bizarre codicil to the Coke Stevenson story. After his days as Speaker, Stevenson was never able to escape from widespread rumors about phony oil leases. No newspaper ever investigated, of course, given the state of the press in Texas at the time, though almost everybody in Texas politics was familiar with the scuttlebutt.

The hearsay focused particularly on Stevenson's deals with the Magnolia Petroleum Company, now out of business. "It was so well known," says Bob Eckhardt, a former Democratic congressman from Houston who was deeply involved in Texas politics in the 1940s as a lawyer in Austin for the oil workers' union. In his Capitol Hill townhouse a few weeks ago, Eckhardt rummaged through his files and produced a yellowing copy of *The Texas Spectator*, a liberal journal that was a forerunner of *The Texas Observer*. On the cover of the issue dated May 24, 1946, is an illustration, drawn by Eckhardt himself, that shows Stevenson surrounded by lovely magnolias, and above his head a caption that reads "Sweet Magnolias." For those who followed Texas politics, the innuendo was plain. Eckhardt was interviewed by Caro, but not on this less-than-saintly aspect of Stevenson's legend. Caro cites many journalistic encomiums to Stevenson—"Log Cabin Statesman" and the like—but he makes no reference to this tradition of Texas skepticism.

The Magnolia deal is even bluntly stated as fact in a footnote of a book on the period, *The Establishment in Texas Politics: The Primitive Years*, by George Norris Green. Caro approvingly adduces this volume in his text to underline Stevenson's honesty, citing Green's assertion that in winning votes in south Texas the ballots were "turned in on time," but he does not mention Green's damaging footnote. Though a smoking gun is not produced, the footnote does prove that the story was in open circulation, and more generally that the place of Coke Stevenson in the political culture of Texas was not at all what Caro thinks it was. Meanwhile Caro chooses to go with "one lobbyist" who told him, "You just instinctively knew that Coke Stevenson was not someone you could approach with any kind of an offer at all. . . . No one would have *dared* to offer Coke Stevenson a dime."

In Austin, it turns out, "Mr. Texas" was more generally known as "Calculatin' Coke," though Caro contemptuously dismisses the appellation, as though brushing dirt off Stevenson's white Stetson. And about Calculatin' Coke there are many illuminating stories that Caro did not see fit to include in *Means of Ascent*.

Caro portrays his hero as being in the profane world of politics, but not of it: "There was a reserve, a dignity, about this tall, broad-shouldered silent man with that watchful stare that set him apart from the crowd." And yet as Speaker he seemed to know well how to service his fellow legislators, at least according to *Texas Merry Go Round*, a book published in 1933 and written by anonymous "watchers of the Texas legislature," almost certainly State House reporters. (The book, like other materials that Caro does not cite, is readily accessible.) "The perquisites of a Legislator," the "watchers" wrote,

> are so extensive that he oftentimes succeeds in having his girlfriend supported at the public cost. The lady, if you please, becomes a stenographer and draws a salary from the State of Texas. In earlier and less efficient days, the girls used to under-

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> go a form of tryout, a committee making solemn pretense of testing their talents as stenographers. But at the present session Coke Stevenson, Speaker of the House, told his supporters to name their choices and appointments would be forthcoming immediately.

One can only imagine how many pages Caro might have lavished on such a story if the name in it were not Stevenson: the sordid, tangled history of perquisites; the sociological origins of the girlfriends, a cavalcade of Sister Carries, their dreams and tragedies; and, finally, the crucial importance of feeding the amoral appetites of others in the rise of an amoral leader.

Then there is the matter of Stevenson's racism. Caro takes two sentences to dispose of it: "There were almost no Negroes in the Hill Country, and Stevenson accepted all the Southern stereotypes about that race. He refused to intervene in wartime race riots in Beaumont, or to investigate a lynching in Texarkana." Stevenson appears here as the passive victim of his time and his place, his inaction really an offense of indifference. And even this acknowledgment of the scuffs on the marble bust of Caro's hero is made grudgingly. These small defects can be charged, Caro writes, to Stevenson's "upbringing in that isolated country . . ."

Caro's description of Stevenson's racial attitudes is so flawed and incomplete that it creates a picture at variance even with his hero's own publicly stated positions. In 1942 a black man named Willie Vinson was accused of raping a white woman, dragged from a hospital bed, and lynched by a mob. It was the first lynching during the war, and it besmirched the international reputation of the United States. Attorney General Francis Biddle wrote a distressed letter to Governor Stevenson urging him to bring the murderers to trial. Stevenson refused to prosecute those responsible for the deed. But it was worse than that: in his reply to the attorney general, he made a sly argument in favor of lynch mobs. "Certain members of the Negro race," he wrote, "from time to time furnish the setting for mob violence by the outrageous crimes which they commit." With this carefully crafted letter, Stevenson shrewdly played to the galleries. (This entire affair, by the way, is recounted in detail by George Norris Green in the book that Caro cites on Stevenson's integrity.)

Race, as we shall see, was a powerful undercurrent in Stevenson's politics, and in his contest with Johnson, but one will not learn this from *Means of Ascent*. Caro's thorough mishandling of the issue begins with his introduction. In it, he attempts to show the positive side of Johnson, delivering his famous "We Shall Overcome" speech in 1965, before he embarks on the exposure of his negative one. The section is a literary and political non sequitur, a misdirection to the reader, perhaps inserted to insulate the author in advance from the sort of harsh criticism from Johnson's partisans that he experienced after the publication of his first volume.

But even this bit of fairness is so intense in its prosecutorial zeal that all nuance is flattened and Johnson's civil rights record is made one-dimensional. "Until 1957, in the Senate, as in the House, his record—by that time a twenty-year record—against civil rights had been consistent," writes Caro. The truth is that Johnson was never more hypocritical than in his votes against civil rights. They were never made out of conviction and were always taken as political positioning, in line with every other statewide Texas officeholder. And even so, in March 1949, after his election to the Senate, he said: "Racial prejudice is dangerous because it is a disease of the majority endangering minority groups. . . . For those who would keep any group in the nation in bondage, I have no sympathy or tolerance."

This was not the normal thing for Texas politicians to say. In 1954 Johnson was the only Southern senator (apart from Estes Kefauver and Albert Gore Sr., both from the border state of Tennessee) to break ranks by refusing to sign the Southern Manifesto in favor of segregation and against the Supreme Court's *Brown* v. *Board of Education* ruling. Senator Richard Neuberger, a liberal Democrat from Oregon, remarked that it was as "courageous an act of political valor as I have seen take place in my adult life."

But Caro goes on: "And although in that year [1957] he oversaw the passage of a civil rights bill (as Majority Leader of the Senate), many liberals had felt the compromises Johnson had engineered to get the bill through had gutted it of its effectiveness—a feeling that proved correct." Now, that bill was not simply "a civil rights bill," as if it were one among many, just another bill about a regular subject of federal legislation. That bill was the *first* civil rights bill passed since Reconstruction—a monumental legislative achievement, whatever its limitations, which Johnson personally guided through enormous difficulties to enactment.

When asked by *The New York Times* why he did not elaborate on Stevenson's racial attitudes in his book, Caro answered: "I did not get into it because it was not an issue in the '48 campaign. Johnson's stated positions were the same as [Stevenson's] on race." Caro's errors of omission and commission, however, fail to square this circle. Johnson, after all, was as much a product of the Hill Country as Stevenson. Why was the "isolated country" an explanation for the one who was racist but not for the one who was not? How *did* a man with a "consistent" record against civil rights wind up telling the nation that "We Shall Overcome"?

Caro's conflation of history with legend is exhaustive. He does not confine himself to Texas politics of the 1940s, but ranges back into the previous century, where he has discovered Governor Richard Coke, after whom Coke Stevenson was named, "a Confederate veteran who in 1873 wrested the government of Texas from the Carpetbaggers and freed the state from the injustices of Reconstruction." Caro traces the source of Stevenson's "Jeffersonian" philosophy in part to this period and to his namesake, even quoting a newspaper article that flatteringly compared Stevenson to the "lion-hearted Richard Coke."

This linkage of Stevenson to Coke is indeed artful and apt, but not quite in the way that Caro intends. Among the vague "injustices of Reconstruction" from which Coke liberated Texas were the political and economic rights of blacks. His victory, enthusiastically supported by the Ku Klux Klan, was accompanied by a terror campaign of beatings and lynchings, described as a "counter-revolution" by the historian James M. Smallwood in *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans During Reconstruction* (another hole in Caro's bibliography). After Coke won, racial segregation was imposed, blacks were virtually disfranchised, and officeholders who refused to back the new regime of Jim Crow were subjected to Klan violence, winked at by the state authorities. Smallwood quotes a statement made by Governor Coke, delivered after a double lynching of blacks: it was, he said, "high time for an enraged and outraged people to take the law into their own hands." It appears that Coke Stevenson really did inherit a legacy as well as a name from Richard Coke.

III.

Early on, Caro explains that he is not a mere chronicler of lives. His true subject, he explains, is not really Stevenson, or even Johnson. It is power. For this student of the anatomy of power, the battle for the Senate in Texas in

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1948 is "the perfect campaign to study." By cutting to its heart, by exposing it "in all its brutality," Caro claims that "there will emerge universal truths." In making his case, however, Caro does not allow certain particular truths to intrude. His "perfect campaign" is perfect only because of the exclusion of these details. But without them, the larger meaning of the election is lost.

Means of Ascent is about how Lyndon Johnson stole an election. (One chapter is called, Stephen King-style, "The Stealing.") By focusing a narrow spotlight on a corner of the stage, Caro keeps the rest in shadows. For Johnson's chicanery, about which there can be no doubt, was not an isolated incident, a rare depredation of democratic politics, that reflects only on his warped character. It took place within a political culture, against a backdrop of other stolen elections, a drama spanning a decade of wild political struggle. At stake, as everyone involved understood, was not just control of the state of Texas, but the national government.

In 1938 W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel, a classic populist charlatan who gained his popularity on a radio show featuring his Hillbilly Boys and fundamentalist homilies, was elected governor. His rhetoric consisted of jeremiads against "professional politicians" and "communistic labor racketeers," and hosannas for "free enterprise." As he held the voters spellbound with his fiddle-playing, his religiosity, and his colorful language, O'Daniel served as the chief political agent of the reactionary oilmen, lawyers, and lobbyists in the state who were ferociously opposed to the New Deal.

The year of O'Daniel's victory in Texas was a year of general reaction against Roosevelt. The Democrats suffered sweeping losses, a political defeat that brought the domestic New Deal to an anticlimactic end. From that time until 1964, when it was smashed by Johnson, the Southern Democratic-Republican coalition in Congress frustrated all major social reform. And it was by riding on the conservative wave of 1938 that Coke Stevenson managed to be elected lieutenant governor.

Caro attributes Stevenson's win to "the way he held himself," always acting "as his conscience dictated," drawing the voters' admiration for his belief in "individual liberty," his "quality," his "sincerity," and the non-political modesty of his campaigning. But unmentioned by Caro is the main reason that Stevenson won the runoff, after finishing second in the primary: he was endorsed by the demagogue O'Daniel. Stevenson's opponent, Pierce Brooks, protested, "All along he has openly declared he was against professional politicians. And surely Stevenson is one." (The story is recounted in Seth McKay's *W. Lee O'Daniel and Texas Politics*, which appears in Caro's bibliography.)

The first movement against the New Deal surfaced in 1936, when a group calling itself "Jeffersonian Democrats for Texas" endorsed Alf Landon against Roosevelt. (Caro does not mention this episode.) By 1940 the opposition in Texas was more organized and powerful, bolstered by the 1938 electoral rebuke to Roosevelt. Its leader was Vice President "Cactus Jack" Garner, who had publicly broken with the president and sought to secure the Democratic nomination for himself on an anti-New Deal platform. Within the Texas Democratic Party, which was Garner's base, a young congressman named Lyndon Johnson emerged as the leader of the Roosevelt faction, whose tactics were directed through LBJ by FDR personally. (This story is told in Caro's first volume.) Garner was easily outmaneuvered and the "Stop Roosevelt" movement in Texas confounded, but bitterness remained.

The following year, after Senator Morris Sheppard suddenly died, Johnson faced O'Daniel in a race to fill the seat. Almost every observer agrees that O'Daniel's razor-thin margin consisted of stolen votes—that he "outstole" Johnson. Caro traces the stealing to "Beer, Inc.," the state's liquor lobby, which was eager to remove the unstable, prohibitionist governor to Washington. But the stealing, according to sources on the scene at the time, was probably not confined to "Beer, Inc." "I tell you one thing," observed Robert Calvert, the Texas Democratic Party chairman in the 1940s, in Dugger's book (cited in Caro's bibliography), "the Stevenson people stole that election in 1941 in some east Texas counties so Stevenson could become governor when O'Daniel won, and if the Johnson people stole this one they were just getting things all squared up!"

It was an article of faith within Johnson's entourage, moreover, that O'Daniel's victory was based on stealing by Stevenson's backers. Johnson himself told Dugger that Stevenson's supporters had "tried to steal the '48 election like they stole the '41 election." The remark is not quoted by Caro. "We felt," J. J. "Jake" Pickle, the longtime congressman from Austin who was an aide to Johnson during his race against Stevenson, told me, "that the lobby group, the Austin crowd, the political friends behind Coke, the hanky-

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panky going on was done by them, with Coke's blessings or not. Someone had to engineer those changes in east Texas. We've always thought it was the Stevenson supporters."

The belief of Johnson—and his aides and allies—that the election of 1941 was stolen by the conservative forces that wanted Stevenson installed as governor undoubtedly provided a powerful motive for Johnson's actions in 1948. Caro never mentions it, though he cites Pickle as one of those he interviewed. And after O'Daniel won, a state investigation into election irregularities, controlled by the new governor, produced a whitewash, thus legitimating O'Daniel's victory. Green's book delves into this aspect of the affair, which Caro completely neglects. Instead, Caro defended his portrait of Stevenson to *The New York Times* by claiming preposterously that "not even Johnson's people disagreed about Stevenson."

Then the conflict within the Texas party reached a new stage of crisis. One of the great curiosities of *Means of Ascent* is that it contains fifty-nine pages about LBJ's helicopter, but there is not a single word in the book devoted to the momentous political events of 1944. And without understanding those events, it is impossible to understand the election of 1948.

In May 1944 the anti-Roosevelt forces, openly mobilized by Senator O'Daniel, tacitly supported by Governor Stevenson, and well financed by the conservative business interests, succeeded in packing the Democratic convention with a slight majority of delegates. After seizing control, their agenda was unveiled: to place "uninstructed" electors on the national ballot in Texas, who would cast their votes in the Electoral College for the Republican ticket. By this stratagem, Texans would be disfranchised in the general election, and the White House perhaps delivered to the Republicans, regardless of the popular vote. In short, the presidential election would be stolen. But the Democratic delegates loyal to Roosevelt and the national party learned of the conservatives' plan and stormed out of the convention, and reformed themselves. At the national convention both delegations were seated, splitting the Texas vote. All summer long the Rooseveltians, who called themselves the Loyalists, organized. In September, a second state convention was held, at which they finally produced a majority.

The right bolted. Primed with oil money, they set up a new political party called the Texas Regulars. Its platform clarified the meaning of their "Jeffersonian" self-designation. Among its points was "Return of state rights which have been destroyed by the Communist-controlled New Deal." And: "Restoration of the supremacy of the white race." The Regulars filled the state's newspapers with full-page ads that exhorted, "Let's keep the White in Old Glory." And they widely distributed a poster in which Sidney Hillman, a liberal labor leader who had organized a political action committee on behalf of Roosevelt and who was Jewish and clean-shaven, was depicted with a rabbinic beard knocking down Uncle Sam.

On election day, in Texas, Roosevelt won 822,000 votes, Dewey 191,000, the Texas Regulars 135,000. Devastated by the immensity of their defeat, the Regulars disbanded themselves as a party. Sam Rayburn (the hero of Caro's first volume about Johnson) remarked that "this election will prove the death knell of certain mountebank politicians in Texas," meaning specifically O'Daniel and Stevenson. Tarnished by their association with the Regulars, neither won office again. *Absolutely none of this is in Caro's book.*

As the Regulars battled the Loyalists, Stevenson was drawn into a maelstrom over academic freedom at the University of Texas. He was against it; and his stand against it was very much part of the politics of 1944. Caro writes two succinct sentences about the whole affair, almost as if apologizing for Stevenson:

> His lack of formal education hurt most after the O'Daniel-dominated Board of Regents of the University of Texas dismissed liberal university president Homer Rainey. The Rainey dismissal caused lasting damage to the concept of academic freedom at the state university, and Stevenson's refusal to intervene in this controversy revealed that he did not adequately grasp that concept.

In fact, five of the eight "O'Daniel-dominated" regents, a body dominated by Texas Regulars, had been reappointed by Stevenson. Witch-hunts for un-Americans had already begun in Texas. In the late 1930s, in an effort to undermine the New Deal, Representative Martin Dies of Texas had launched a series of investigations as chairman of the first House Un-American Activities Committee. The university regents were infected by this spirit of inquiry, having learned that students in one course were required to read John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* One by one, professors were summoned before their tribunal and asked whether they were real Texans or "foreigners." Rainey, the university president, called together the faculty and read a statement defending academic freedom—for which he was removed. The students declared a strike, and the Lone Star flag on the main building overlooking the State House was lowered to half-staff. The largest demonstration anyone had ever witnessed in Austin proceeded by the thousands behind the Longhorn Band playing Chopin's "Funeral March" and a coffin draped with a sign: "Academic Freedom is Dead." The final destination of this protest was the governor's mansion, where Stevenson lived, which they surrounded, singing "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You." (This is discussed in *Lone-Star Land* by Frank Goodwyn, which is cited by Caro in his bibliography.)

In 1948 the battle royal between the Regulars and the Loyalists resumed, more passionately joined than ever. The Regulars had regrouped inside the party in an attempt to gain control of it, impose their own electors, and depose the Democratic president. Their confidence was buoyed by the conservative postwar mood in which the Democrats suffered worse losses in 1946 than they had in 1938. Roosevelt, moreover, was no longer dominating the scene; and his successor Truman was unpopular and vulnerable. Truman was also a clearer and stronger advocate of black rights than Roosevelt. The president issued an executive order barring segregation in the armed forces and forced the first civil rights plank into a Democratic Party platform. Outraged conservative Southerners staged a walkout and formed the States Rights (or Dixiecrat) Party, running Strom Thurmond as a presidential candidate.

In this atmosphere, Johnson tacked right. Caro ultimately attributes all these moves to his character. (The index listings for Johnson include: "cruelty . . . cynicism . . . manipulativeness . . . avoidance of taking stands . . . power for its own sake.") Stevenson, meanwhile, is evoked as a model of imperturbability. (His index listings include: "dignity . . . fairness . . . honesty and integrity . . . taciturnity.") The contest of 1948, according to Caro, was between principle and lack of principle. What he has overlooked completely is politics, or political cause and effect, not to mention a number of facts.

Stevenson campaigned, writes Caro, "as he had always campaigned, driving around the state, shaking hands, talking to handfuls of voters about 'principles' and the need for 'economy' and 'common sense' in government." Caro does not mention Stevenson's early attack on Truman's civil rights program, his en-

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couragement of the Southern revolt, his demands that the Democratic platform "leave off all reference to civil rights." (These are all documented in Seth McKay's *Texas and the Fair Deal*, which is listed in Caro's bibliography.) Caro elaborates on Johnson's scurrilous and absurd red-baiting of Stevenson, but he neglects Stevenson's more vicious attacks, tinged with racism. Stevenson charged not only that Johnson opposed funding the House Un-American Activities Committee, but also that Johnson had lined up in Congress with the left-wing "Vito Marcantonio of the Harlem district"—with one stroke casting Johnson as red and black.

Johnson's victory, according to Caro, was the fruit of character assassination, a helicopter, and theft. Caro appears to have accounted, with circumstantial evidence, for the eighty-seven votes in Ballot Box 13; but he fails to offer any convincing explanation whatever for the votes in the other ballot boxes, for the tens of thousands of other Johnson votes. The truth is that Johnson, unlike Stevenson, grasped the historical moment and the changing constituencies of the electorate, and sought to shape them.

Johnson understood that the campaign of 1948 was the first campaign of the cold war. Almost immediately, he had Stevenson on the defensive as an isolationist, a position that "Coffee Coolin' Coke" took his time disclaiming. Johnson, who had been a member of the Naval Affairs Committee, flourished his specific knowledge in contrast to Stevenson's ignorance masquerading as "taciturnity." Johnson also instinctively knew that the returned World War II veterans and their families were the decisive voters. It was a generational constituency. Johnson was young, Stevenson was old. Johnson, for all his tall tales, was a decorated combat veteran. Stevenson was tall in the saddle but never saw the inside of a cockpit.

Horace Busby, who was Johnson's longtime aide and now publishes a political newsletter in Washington, told me:

> Johnson came up with his slogan in the middle of the campaign: Peace, Preparedness and Progress. He called it the three Ps. Johnson was making all the kinds of arguments you would hear in a national context, keeping our preparedness up to meet the Russian threat. It was proceeding on two different levels. Coke didn't understand it, of course. He was running on how we don't have good ol' boys from Texas [in the Senate]. It was the State House candidate versus the national candidate. One was very parochial, one anything but parochial.
>
> Johnson was behind 72,000 votes after the first primary. I saw after two, three weeks at public rallies that the issue was working very well with all these young World War II veterans, who maybe got married when they came back. They were fed up with whatever this side meant to offer. It was not strictly isolationism, but it was old hat, old ways, old everything. They didn't want it. That's why we won.

Busby was interviewed by Caro; he says that they had "several discussions of Johnson's strategy." But now Busby complains that in *Means of Ascent* "Caro discounts that anything was going on except that Johnson was stealing votes."

Critical to Johnson's strategy was his alliance with the Loyalists. Their struggle against the Regulars and his campaign against Stevenson brought them together in a common cause. "This was a backlash from the 1944 campaign," Creekmore Fath explained to me. Fath is an Austin lawyer who was the Texas manager of the Truman campaign, a central figure in Texas politics, who refused to be interviewed by Caro. "The whole fight was who was going to control the machinery of the state Democratic Party. Johnson made his deal, that he would support the Loyalists to take control of the executive committee if they would support him." Caro locates the origin of this alliance at the state Democratic convention, where Johnson wanted his eighty-seven-vote margin over Stevenson certified, and presents it as a straightforward political quid pro quo, not as the convergence of large historical forces. Fath says that Johnson and the Loyalists made their compact "two months before the primary election."

The Loyalists were willing to work very hard for Johnson, despite his waverings and his compromises, because "on the basis of comparison in Texas, he was liberal," says Walter Hall, a progressive businessman prominently involved in the Loyalist cause, who was Johnson's chief supporter in Galveston. (Caro did not interview him.) "They had been running Texas for a long time—the big oil companies, the big banks, insurance companies, the newspapers." Before supporting Johnson, Hall peppered him with questions about his positions on federal aid to education, national health care, and even voting rights for blacks. "After my conversations, I envisioned him becoming a progressive senator. Anyone who was halfway informed on the two men knew the difference. I supported Lyndon in every way I knew how."

Indeed, Stevenson's presence in the race was itself a compelling reason for the Loyalists to help Johnson. "Stevenson," says Fath, "was as corrupt as a Texas politician can get." Johnson understood Stevenson's reputation in these quarters, and he exploited it. "Coke was very much sided with the Regulars," recalls Pickle. "He was their symbol. Coke was just a solid sort of representative, reliable to his crowd, available."

Still, most of the Loyalists were not motivated by affection for Johnson. They were fearful, above all, that the presidential election might be stolen in Texas. "I didn't care about the Johnson question," says Bob Eckhardt, who was designated by the Loyalists to work out with John Connally (then Johnson's aide) the details of certifying the senatorial vote at the convention. The result was that a number of Dixiecrat delegations were unseated, the Loyalists triumphed within the party, and Johnson was declared the nominee. Eckhardt recalls watching Stevenson supporters march out of the convention behind a Confederate flag.

Stevenson's last hope was the courts. Caro writes that he was determined to make a last stand for his beliefs, "the Code of the West." His lawyer was Dan Moody, a former governor, whom Caro fails to identify as a leader of the Texas Regulars, who presided as the chairman of the 1944 rump Democratic convention after the Loyalists angrily split. But Stevenson's legal efforts were futile. The results of the election were upheld; Ballot Box 13 was never unsealed. Johnson went on to an easy win over the Republican Jack Porter, whom Stevenson endorsed. (Caro doesn't identify him as a former Texas Regular either.) And Truman, to the surprise of almost everyone, won Texas by a larger margin than any other state.

Means of Ascent is a foreshadowing of Caro's future volumes, in which he will establish his master idea of Johnson's responsibility for the "shredding of the delicate yet crucial fabric of credence and faith between the people of the United States and the man they had placed in the White House"—a fabric that "until the day of Kennedy's death" was "whole." It is hard to imagine a more naive and sentimental rendering of America's conflict-ridden history. (One hundred years before Kennedy sent advisers to Vietnam, the American "fabric" was rather creased by the shelling of Fort Sumter.) In truth, the history missing from *Means of Ascent* foreshadows a different and even more pertinent story: the origins of the modern Texas Republican Party, whose favorite son currently inhabits the White House.

Caro intended, in his saga of the 1948 campaign, to reveal "universal truths"

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about power. But he is not a student of power, he is a hater of it. For Caro, power is essentially corrupt and coercive. He sees almost every transaction among political actors as intrinsically venal. Against power, he poses righteousness. He is constantly seeking purity of heart in politics.

To hate power, however, is to hate politics. Caro's notion of power is bizarrely apolitical. It is no wonder, then, that finally he put all real political analysis aside in favor of the Great Man theory of history (which has always been a way of putting much of history aside, too). And the Great Man theory of history turns out to be extremely hospitable to the conventions of contemporary political journalism, in which a fixation on behind-the-scenes mechanics is combined with a belief in the explanatory power of personality, in the reduction of political behavior to psychology—all presented, of course, as sacred fact. Caro's massive and Manichaean work merely reproduces and expands upon those conventions.

Caro has used his material selectively, tendentiously, to confirm his Manichaeanism. "Threads, bright and dark, run side by side through most of Lyndon Johnson's life," he writes. ". . . The two threads do not run side by side in this volume. The bright one is missing." But the notion of a bright thread is as false as the notion of a dark thread. For this reason, Johnson has eluded Caro—the more complex, even darker Lyndon Johnson who was an unlovable man desperate to be loved, whose cynicism and idealism were mysteriously inseparable, all of a piece. "A man's virtue may be but the defect of his desire, as his crime may be but a function of his virtue," wrote Robert Penn Warren in *All the King's Men*. There are no such depths and no such ambiguities in Robert Caro's Texan epic. •

At Home Abroad

By Amy Clampitt

Henry James and Edith Wharton
Letters: 1900-1915
edited by Lyall H. Powers
(Scribners, 412 pp., $29.95)

Novellas and Other Writings
by Edith Wharton
edited by Cynthia Griffin Wolff
(Library of America, 1,152 pp., $35)

Edith Wharton wrote of Henry James, in later years, as "perhaps the most intimate friend I ever had, though in many ways we were so different." As novelists and as social animals, on the contrary, they had much in common. Wharton herself observed that James "belonged irrevocably to the old America out of which I also came, and of which—almost—it might paradoxically be said that to follow up its last traces one had to come to Europe." Both had nostalgic memories of living abroad as children, and their feelings about the country they had left but kept returning to, in fact or in imagination, were inevitably mixed.

Their return visits twice coincided, and some of the meatiest entries in the *Letters: 1900-1915* were written on American soil. This correspondence, or what remains of it, is so lopsided as hardly to merit the name: there are 167 items signed by James and just twenty-nine signed by Wharton, of which meager hoard a mere thirteen are addressed to James himself. (The rest, given in an appendix, were written to his secretary, Theodora Bosanquet, during the final months of his life.) Twice—in November 1909 and six years later—a despondent James had burned quantities of his papers, among them a good many letters from the younger novelist. Among the earliest of these would have been a note offering good wishes for the opening, on January 5, 1895—a calamitously crucial date, as it turned out—of his play *Guy Domville*. Wharton's own career as a writer had then no more than been launched. Several poems and short stories had appeared, but as yet no novel. His, as a consequence of that January evening, was to enter what too few of his readers thought of as its major phase.

Lyall H. Powers dates the meeting that launched their friendship to 1903. James was sixty-three; Wharton was forty-one. She later recalled that she had already been twice in his presence, years before while she was still in her twenties, and too shy to do more than look her prettiest in the hope of attracting his attention "so that I might at last pluck up courage to blurt out my admiration for *Daisy Miller* and *The Portrait of a Lady*." Concerning his later works, she expressed herself variously. Clearly she had reservations. But she sent their author her books, he reciprocated with his own—and he was generous as well with literary advice. She *must*, he once declared, "be tethered in native pastures, even if it reduces her to a back-yard in New York."

When James returned to America in August 1904 for a yearlong stay, he found his protégé in residence, if not exactly tethered, at what was then still her home in the Berkshires. Among the visitors that autumn were Walter Berry, a longtime friend, and Morton Fullerton, a journalist whom Wharton had met through James and who was about to alter her life drastically and forever. The letters that James wrote her during this period are still to "Dear Mrs. Wharton," but by the time he found himself a guest of George Vanderbilt, at Biltmore in North Carolina, early in the following year, their tone had grown confidingly expansive. "The mere pen," he declared, ". . . can do but scant justice to the various elements of my situation, the recent, the constant, & the above all acutely—*so* acutely—actual, & that really to talk about them we must take some future N.Y. good fireside hour & then thresh them out to the last straw."

It is an instructive pleasure to note the metaphorical vigilance of that "last straw." Whatever his material, James is not going to give himself an easy time. Virtually alone in Vanderbilt's "strange, colossal heart-breaking house, & the desolation & discomfort of the whole thing—whole scene," we see him, after pronouncing it "indescribable," struggling to describe it anyhow: "It's, *in effect*, like a gorgeous practical joke—but at one's own expense, after all, if one has to live in solitude in these leagues-long marble halls, & sit in alternate Gothic & Palladian cathedrals as it were—where now only the temperature stalks about—." And, writer that he is, he qualifies as he goes: "In the early spring,

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I can conceive it as admirable. And I feel that in speaking of it as I have, I don't do justice to the house as a phenomenon (of brute *achievement*)." Compunction sets in: having "been down to luncheon, and been able to see more of the house," he confesses to feeling "a bit shabby at failing to rise to my host's own conception."

Ten letters, all neatly turned, several of them substantial, went from James to Wharton during that year in America, 1904-05. Back in England, though, he gave an appearance of having pulled back a little: "You cannot say that I have bombarded you with letters," he begins. Had she, perhaps, bombarded him? Still ruminating, he takes up the "question of the *roman de moeurs* in American—its deadly difficulty"—to which he has been brought by the concluding installment of *The House of Mirth*. His admiration, though generous, is qualified. "I wish we could talk of it in a motor-car. I have been in motor-cars again, a little, since our wonderful return from Ashfield; but with no such talk as that." However he might deplore every other form of bustle (his dislike of the elevator amounted to a frenzy), James at the dawn of our hapless love affair with the internal combustion engine assigned it a rapturously prolonged erotic hyperbole. "The Vehicle of Passion," he called it—or simply "She, the great She."

Passion, of a less whimsical sort, had its part in the intimacy that had begun during a series of daylong expeditions into the Berkshires during the autumn of 1904, and would continue in the French, as well as the English, countryside. Only lately disinterred from the ponderous circumspections of all concerned, Wharton's love affair with Morton Fullerton can be followed here thanks only to Powers's meticulous annotations. Without them, James's occasional discreet references and salutations offer little clue. And Wharton's own memoirs are still more opaque; one could read *A Backward Glance* without guessing that her calamitously troublesome marriage to Teddy Wharton was even unhappy. In James's letters, on the other hand, we see his imagination repeatedly rising to the drama, and to his own role as a kind of Racinian confidant: "Live it all through, every inch of it—out of it something valuable will come—but live it ever so quietly . . . and you'll come down and see me here and we'll talk à perte de vue, and there will be something in that for both of us."

That was in 1908. Two years later the roles of confidant and protagonist had acquired equal weight for both of them. Life for each was at its most charged, and their letters were likewise freighted. The New York Edition of James's works, on which he had concentrated large hopes and energies, had been a financial disaster. Suffering increasingly frequent bouts of illness and depression, he had also been alarmed over the decline of his older brother (and archrival) William, who was to die at Chocorua, New Hampshire, on August 26, 1910. A series of letters to the confidant, who was now "Dearest Edith," records his sitting there "stricken and in darkness," stunned by "the difference in the world and the whole aspect of life [made] by the extinction of his so cherished and dominant presence": "My beloved brother's death has cut into me, deep down, even as an absolute mutilation." Still in New Hampshire with his brother's family, he observes:

> You may say that *any* stay, no matter how long, in our unspeakable country is a scant value—though, just now, in this gorgeous & so native weather with the great chamber of nature hung about as with some embossed & gilded crimsoned and purpled cuir de Cordoue. . . . However, the great matter is that if you really *are* to sail on the deplorable Oct. 15th we absolutely must meet before.

The proposed meeting did take place: Edith Wharton dined in New York with Henry James and, once again, Walter Berry and Morton Fullerton. Teddy Wharton, with whom she had patched things up again one more time, had just departed on a world tour. The strain upon her emotional resources, though unrecorded, must have been great as she prepared to sail for Europe after that gathering in New York. James had more than once, in his half-teasing admiration, called Wharton "terrible"—had called her even "the Angel of Devastation." In fact, the devastations of her own life during this period were such as to have undone forever a woman of less fortitude. She had learned of embezzlements and other escapades on the part of her unimaginable lightweight of a husband, and of her lover Fullerton's equally if not more unsavory past; that love affair was already coming to an end. Meanwhile she shifted households and twice crossed the Atlantic, in addition to the usually motorized hurtlings across the map of England and the Continent.

It is no wonder that on her return to Paris she broke down completely. Her endurance up until that moment appears not so much prodigious as demonic, when her writings of the time are taken into account. Besides working sporadically at *The Custom of the Country*, in that year she had also published a collection of ghost stories and a collection of poet-

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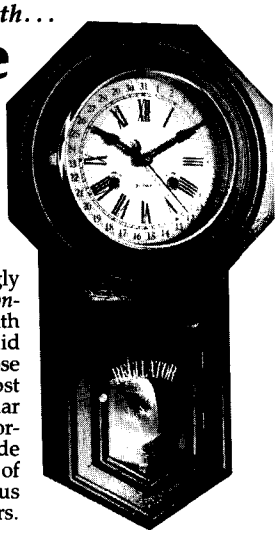

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ry. By December 1910, only weeks after her collapse, she was at work again on a story, which grew to the length of a novella and began appearing the following summer. Its title was *Ethan Frome*.

In reading James's letters it is hard not to link this famous tale to a passage dating to November 17, 1906:

> I am wondering if you are not feeling just now perhaps a good deal, at Lenox, in the apparently delightful old 1840 way—a good snowstorm aiding. . . . But how I want to have it all—the gossip of the countryside—from you! Some of it has come to me as rather dreadful . . . and that is what some of the lone houses in the deep valleys we motored through used to make me think of.

Wharton, in *A Backward Glance*, recalled that the first pages of *Ethan Frome* had originally been written, in French, purely as an exercise, some years before she set to work on it in earnest. The motor-car had made the project possible:

> In those epic days roads and motors were an equally unknown quantity, and one set out on a ten-mile run with more apprehension than would now attend a journey across Africa. But the range of country-lovers like myself had hitherto been so limited, and our imagination so tantalized by the mystery beyond the next blue hills, that there was inexhaustible delight in penetrating to the remoter parts of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, discovering derelict villages with Georgian churches and balustraded house-fronts, exploring slumbrous mountain valleys, and coming back weary but laden with a new harvest of beauty, after sticking fast in ruts, having to push the car uphill, to rout out the village blacksmith for repairs, and suffer the jeers of horse-drawn travelers trotting gaily past us.

The pleasures of the house at Lenox were such that had it not been for her husband's inability to settle anywhere, Wharton might very well have established herself there. It was otherwise for James. He could write eloquently of the New England countryside; but he referred to "repatriation" as "a mere lurid dream," and it is the testimony of Wharton in *A Backward Glance* that "he was never really happy or at home" in America.

Given the virtual absence of her letters from Powers's collection, the inclusion of *A Backward Glance* in the latest addition to the Library of America amounts to a happy accident. Following a total of eight novellas (*Madame de Treymes, Ethan Frome, Summer, False Dawn, The Old Maid, The Spark, New Year's Day*, and *The Mother's Recompense*), the editor, Cynthia Griffin Wolff, has also appended a hitherto unpublished, and rather more forthcoming, autobiographical fragment, titled "Life and I." Unfortunately it breaks off early. In *A Backward Glance* Wharton writes at entertaining length of her friendship with James; but one could wish for a bit more of the candor with which she recorded, in that late fragment, her dislike of the company of other little girls, as well as her early propensities as a storyteller:

> Never shall I forget the long-drawn weariness of the hours passed with "nice" little girls . . . when the "pull" became too strong, I would politely ask my unsuspecting companions to excuse me while I "went to speak to mamma," and dashing into the drawing-room I would pant out, "Mamma, please go and amuse those children. *I must make up.*" . . . Oh, the exquisite relief of those moments of escape from the effort of trying to "be like other children"!

More poignant still is the recollection of how "a penetrating sense of 'not-niceness' " kept her from pursuing any inquiry about where babies came from until the very eve of her own marriage, when "I was seized with such a dread of the whole dark mystery, that I summoned up courage to appeal to my mother, and begged her . . . to tell me 'what being married was like.' " This time, disapproval could not stifle the fearful need to know what was about to happen to herself:

> The coldness of her expression deepened to disgust. She was silent for a dreadful moment; then she said with an effort: "You've seen enough pictures and statues in your life. Haven't you noticed that men are—made differently from women?"

Wharton was by then twenty-three. She had resolved, many years later, to set down this harrowing conversation "because the training of which it was the dreadful and logical conclusion did more than anything else to falsify and misdirect my whole life." Bravely though she goes on to insist that "in the end" her life was neither falsified nor misdirected, the cost is unmistakable.

That cost, it may be added, also gives strength to her most memorable work. Those of her female characters whom experience does not finally destroy, as it destroys Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, emerge maimed and wary, if not literally paralyzed or otherwise locked into the stasis of futility. Such is the fate of Mattie Silver in *Ethan Frome*, of Charity Royall in *Summer*, of Sophy Viner in *The Reef*, of Kate Clephane in *The Mother's Recompense*; they are all victims to some degree of their own generous impulses. A different kind of character, who seems especially, and touchingly, close to Wharton's own experience is Anna, in *The Reef*. She learns how her lover entered into a casual affair while he was waiting for her answer to his proposal of marriage, and, out of the virginal bewilderment of generations of women who have married and borne children without any recompense of physical enjoyment, she pleads to be told, "Do such things happen to men often?"

James, in a letter of December 1912, declared *The Reef* "quite the finest thing you have done; both *more* done than even the best of your other doing, and more worth it through intrinsic value, interest, and beauty." He read it, he said, "as a Drama, and almost, as it seems to me, one of the psychologic Racinian unity, intensity, and gracility." Even here, the praise is qualified: "I'm not sure [Anna's] oscillations are not beyond our notation" is a politer way of registering what a reader cannot but feel, that Anna's decisions and revisions, moment by moment and reversal by reversal, go on more than a few pages too long—as one does not feel in the process of a Jamesian consciousness unfolding.

Still later, James bestowed an equal praise on the very different, and in its way more accomplished, *Custom of the Country*: "I hang on the sequences," he wrote in February 1913, "with a beating heart and *such* a sense of your craft, your cunning, your devilish resources in the perpetration of them." By now his protégé has indeed become his "Dear and admirable Confrère." He had likewise admired *Ethan Frome*, for its "art and tone and truth—a beautiful artful *kept-downness*, and yet effective cumulation."

I find myself regretting that he did not live to respond to the companion and counterpart of that bleak winter's tale, the less often reprinted *Summer*. Like *Ethan Frome*, it was written in France. By then Europe was at war, and Wharton's demonic energies had been channeled into a tornado of volunteer work for the Red Cross—first in setting up a workroom for women whose livelihood had been cut off by the fighting, then in fundraising for Belgian refugees, then in seeing to the needs of military hospitals, among still other projects. "After two years," she wrote, "we all became strangely inured to a state which at first made intellectual detachment impossible. . . . All the pessimism and lamentation," she added, "came from the idlers, while those who were laboring to the limits possessed their souls."

It was in this mental state that Wharton began to write, "at a high pitch of creative joy, but amid a thousand interruptions, and while the rest of my being was steeped in the tragic realities of the war; yet I do not remember ever visualizing with more intensity the inner scene,

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or the creatures peopling it." This estimate seems borne out by the story itself. At once idyllic and shocking, *Summer* seems as a whole to be drenched in radiance, the poetry of what cannot last. Through the kind of imaginative projection that permitted George Eliot improbably to endow a Hetty Sorel or a Gwendolen Harleth with so much of herself, Wharton seems, in *Summer*, to have given to the figure of Charity Royall, the backwoods foundling whose dream of rising in the world is over when the season ends, the unstinted richness of her own emotional awakening.

It had been the desire of each—as Wharton confessed of herself—"to love and to look pretty." Rare is the woman who can free herself of that desire, and this Wharton was clearheaded enough to acknowledge. The story of Charity Royall's own awakening and abandonment seems almost to tell itself, without any of those stretches of insipid dialogue that weaken the fabric of so many Wharton narratives—and with such vividness that we become increasingly agitated participants in the process. What makes *Summer* more than a painful exposé, finally, of what men do to women is the unfolding character of the crude but not simple guardian with whom her fate is entangled. "Lawyer Royall" is, indeed, the most complex and disturbing of several elderly male characters who add ballast to her later fiction. What would Henry James have made of him? But by the end of February 1916 he was dead.

His letters to Edith Wharton continued through September 1915. A number of them were typed from dictation. His concern was now mainly, sometimes feverishly, with the progress of the war. Her letters to him were now zealously preserved, and handed about. Such first-hand reporting as this, from a letter dated Verdun, February 28, 1915, is bound to have been circulated:

> We went on to Verdun after lunch, stopping at Blercourt to see a touching little ambulance where the sick and nervously shattered are sent till they can be moved. Most of them are in the village church, four rows of beds down the nave, and when we went in the curé was just ringing the bell for vespers. Then he went and put on his vestments, and reappeared at the lighted altar with his acolyte, and incense began to float over the pale heads on the pillows, and the villagers came into the church, and, standing between the beds, sang a strange wailing thing that repeats at the end of every verse:
>
> "Sauvez, sauvez la France,
> Ne l'abandonnez pas!"—It was poignant.

To this, in a hand-written letter, James responded:

> . . . your impression is rendered in a degree so vivid and touching that it all (especially those vespers in the church with the tragic beds in the aisles) wrings tears from my aged eyes. What a hungry *luxury* to be able to come back with things and give them then and there straight into the aching voids: do it, *do* it, my blest Edith, for all you're worth: rather, rather—"sauvez, sauvez la France!" Ah, je la sauverais bien, moi, if I hadn't been ruined myself too soon!

That was in March. In October Wharton crossed the Channel and saw James for the last time. It had seemed, she wrote many years afterward, "as though a man of his powerful frame and unimpaired intellectual vitality ought to have lived longer." But he had—as she observed—been shaken by the death of his brother, as well as weakened by the disappointment of his long-held hope of becoming a successful dramatist. In the end, though, as she wrote in *A Backward Glance*, "what really gave him his deathblow was the war. He struggled through two years of it, then veiled his eyes from the endless perspective of destruction. It was the gesture of Agamemnon, covering his face with his cloak before the unbearable."

In December 1915, when word came that James was unmistakably dying, Wharton wrote, "His friendship was the pride and honor of my life." There is in this more than the hyperbole of grief. Their friendship had been as full of nuance and complexity as it was in the end deeply rooted. All of James's own ambivalence toward women, especially women of force and determination, was set quivering by the "Dearest Edith" of whom he could write that she "rode the whirlwind, she played with the storm, she laid waste whatever of the land the other raging elements had spared"—and to whom he would comically admit "the desire, the frantic impulse of scared childhood, to plunge my head under the bed-clothes and burrow there, not to let it (i.e. Her!) get me!"

By "Her" he only partly meant "Dearest Edith's" omnipresently seductive motor-car. This kind of badinage runs at one level all through their correspondence. "The real marriage of two minds," she observed, "is for any two people to possess a sense of humor or irony pitched in exactly the same key." But what gives life, now, to the surviving correspondence between Wharton and James, thanks to the available supplements and annotations that enable one to enter into the sympathies of both participants, is the largeness of James's own thwarted but still powerful dramatic sense. His long letter of praise for *The Reef*, written in December 1912, rose finally into a passage that Edith Wharton must have treasured for the rest of her life:

> There used to be little notes in you that were like fine benevolent finger-marks, of the good George Eliot—the echo of much reading of that excellent woman here and there, that is, sounding through. But now you are like a lost and recovered "ancient" whom *she* might have got a reading of (especially were he a Greek) and of whom in *her* texture some weaker reflection were to show. For, dearest Edith, you are stronger and firmer and finer than all of them put together. . . . Clearly you have only to pull, and everything will come.

It may be said that nothing in Wharton's large fictional output after her "cher Maître" was gone quite measured up to this noble (though even here, inevitably qualified) hyperbole. She kept at it, writing book after book on lives briefly raised out of, and then reclaimed by, the stasis of convention, in New York or on the French Riviera, or both. It is regrettable, if not really surprising, that *The Mother's Recompense*, the last of the novellas in the Library of America volume, though expertly framed by the stasis she knew all too well, reads very much like a soap opera. James himself was not always at his best. Wharton is most intensely so in exploring the specific quality of the pain that comes of being a woman. In this she is unsurpassed except by George Eliot at *her* most intense.

The intuitive genius of James approached that pain in a manner uniquely his own, and raised it to a higher level of dramatic art. Of the depth of that intuition there can be no doubt, and it was at such depths, finally, that his friendship with Wharton most freely moved. This is evident from a letter addressed to his "dear and admirable Confrère," a few weeks after the one just quoted: "I can't possibly not want to thank you on the spot for your so deeply interesting and moving letter, this morning received," it begins, and later declares that "you will see and feel what I mean—being about the only person who ever does, in general."

The occasion, we learn from the notes, was that with Teddy Wharton's behavior finally too egregious to bear, she was about to sue for divorce. In concluding with what is normally no more than an empty form, "Je vous embrasse and am all devotedly yr. H.J.," the signer had (as so often in his fiction) filled that form and left it brimming with his own reality. All her life, she had preferred the company of men. Unlike most of those she had known, he was there when she needed him.

AMY CLAMPITT is the author most recently of *Westward* (Knopf).

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Leaps of Faith

BY ANN HULBERT

In a Father's Place by Christopher Tilghman

(Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 214 pp., $18.95)

In the last of the stories in this collection, an aloof and spiritual woman describes how she takes her elderly neighbor on walks in the New Hampshire woods and tells her stories from her life: "When I repeat myself, she starts jabbing a deformed knuckle into my side to urge me to get on to the parts she loves, about trains, and about people who fear for their souls." Christopher Tilghman's stories are also about journeys and travails, but he is far from aloof. His first collection unfolds at a serene pace, the calm born not of detachment but of devoted interest in small details, which open onto larger spaces. There's no rushing him to the parts about (in his case) boats and about people whose souls are unsteady but sturdy, afloat in a world that inspires them with doubt.

Inspires rather than daunts them: "Hope had kept him going, but it was the doubt that gave him joy," Stanley Harris, recently dead, reflects in "Gracious Rain" as he looks back over a life that has seemed to him inexplicably blessed in its accumulation of mostly happy accidents. The revelation of this unusual story, which nonchalantly steps into the afterlife as though barely a doorsill stood in the way, is that for Stanley, dead too soon of an unhappy accident, "The quest was not over. He had been spared once again, spared the end of doubt, preserved from eternal rest. Life, in other words, went on."

What is distinctive about the transcendent impulse that surfaces in so many of Tilghman's stories is that it doesn't take the characters away from the world so much as return them to it. Rather than shattering everyday life, the epiphanies that happen here put errant pieces of ordinary days into a new shape—rarely a well-rounded or fixed shape, but that is usually the point. At his best, Tilghman doesn't stage easy leaps out of confusion, but merely turns a corner to find a moment of greater clarity about the confusion—a moment that, it seems clear, isn't likely to last.

As the title of this collection of seven stories suggests, life for the characters goes on mostly within the confines of the family. Like many American fiction writers lately, Tilghman is a master of mundane realism—doesn't miss the wet Pampers, the hot kitchens, the rumpled beds. But at the same time that he's watching the eddies of need and desire inside the house, he also has his eye on history, and on nature. And it's while he's doing that, as Stanley's experience shows most explicitly, that Tilghman looks across yet another threshold, reaching for a timeless perspective on the passage of time, on the "passionate daily traffic in perishables," as Leslie Farber once described the essential drama of family life.

Landscape matters in these stories, and Tilghman plants his characters all over the country—in Montana; in Norfolk, Virginia in the summer, charmless and hot; on roads leading out of the plains and into the mountains; and, the place he's most at home, on Maryland's Eastern Shore, on "land just barely afloat on fragile banks of clay and sand," the Chesapeake Bay always encroaching and the Bay Bridge rising in the background, a reminder of a mainland that seems far away. Big cities, it's worth noting, don't appear, except in the background, and it is hard to imagine Tilghman keeping his calm pace amid urban bustle. Not that his scenes are placid. Nature is usually a physical and psychological challenge in the foreground of his characters' lives, tiring them out, making them feel trapped. But if their roots in the places they have settled are sometimes constricting, ultimately their groundedness is a liberation to their spirits.

History haunts them in a very different way. Tilghman unfolds their far-flung lives against a common background: the advent of the post-Vietnam era, with its mood of doubt about the direction of public life, and about the traditional bonds of private life. That's not to suggest that this collection is facilely contemporary, another contribution to the genre of certifiably up-to-date dramas of disillusionment and unhappiness. On the contrary, there is a refreshingly anachronistic air about these stories. Tilghman's imagination is unobtrusively historical, not superficially sociological. He's as interested, if not more, in the old ways of life that were overturned not so long ago as in the contemporary changes that have replaced them. And the doubt that has accompanied the changes is anything but enervating.

These are stories with real plots. Tilghman catches his characters at moments of transition, when their lives have suddenly taken a turn, and he leaves them with a new perspective not just on themselves, but on the world—an unusual push beyond psychological drama to social observation and then to moral reflection. As its title promises, "Norfolk, 1969" is the one story in which Tilghman writes directly about the tumultuous era that occupies a quiet but important place in the background of the collection, and it shows just how out of the conventional currents his vision runs. Charlie and Julie Martin, young and newly married, arrive in Norfolk, where Charlie is about to begin his three-year stint with the Navy. It's clear from the start that a saga of troubled love is in store, but it's only slowly and subtly that the political contours of that trouble emerge—and just as subtly they are complicated by a deeper, unideological perspective.

Charlie sails away from his wife full of ambivalence, both about leaving Julie and about having ended up in the Navy: the unspoken, important fact about Charlie is that he didn't evade the draft. But while he's at sea this diffident draftee is suddenly overcome with loyalty to his ship:

> The farther the *Jupiter* plowed toward the center of the ocean, the more an elemental soul asserted itself, swells of time, growing over a million square miles. . . . None of the anguishes of the age, none of the compromises that had been forced on him, none of the political confusions in his head, mattered anymore.

Back on shore, Julie has meanwhile discovered what counterculture there is in Norfolk and now occupies a central place in a circle of anti-war activists, among whom Charlie feels awkward on his return, though he tries to join in. One night when the group gathers over marijuana, talking about quiet communion with nature, Charlie is roused from his usual silence to describe his ecstasy at sea—only to be met with stony silence. At that moment he suddenly sees

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how far away from their certainty he feels, though he joins Julie in the march on Washington, still grasping for a sense of political and social solidarity, for "a place in his time." A story that risks slipping into the Coming Home genre follows a more complicated course and finally embraces muddle rather than melodrama. When Charlie looks back years later, trudging in a now widened "middle of the road," what he remembers is how truly at sea he was—out on those infinite "swells of time."

The water is again an arbiter in a very different story, "On the Rivershore," in which Tilghman conjures up a world that existed back on the other side of the war. Like almost all of his stories, it opens with an evocation of place: it's a beach on the Eastern Shore, and the description is metaphorically as well as physically telling: "The sand is fine enough, but it is sharp with oyster shells and rough with stones the color of oxblood and ginger. There's always a tangled line of seaweed running the length of the last high tide." This is a story about one bloody day in the 1950s when the line dividing the local watermen—oystermen, clam diggers, and seine haulers—and the farmers back on shore was suddenly tangled, a prelude to much more drastic dislocations to come.

Here, too, the larger scene quietly builds around a smaller domestic drama. Twelve-year-old Cecil Mayberry has just seen his father, a tenant farmer, shoot Tommie Todman, a troublemaking waterman, in the head. There's a slow-motion feel to the prose in which Tilghman traces the consequences of an act that, as the stunned boy half-realizes but can't quite believe, threatens to wreak havoc on the shoreline world that is his life. But the water swallows up the trouble, and for a time at least the local peace is kept. Out on the Bay, where Cecil, his father, and his father's boss go to dump the body, a battle with avenging watermen is averted when, in a sudden moment of understanding, the men realize it isn't worth disrupting the delicate balance of Bay life for the likes of no good Tommie.

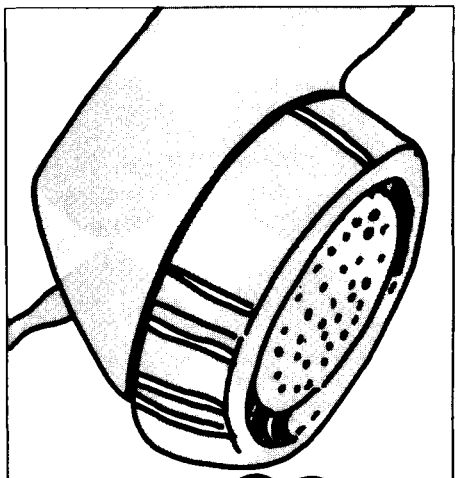
They all watch as the body sinks to the depths; the law and local codes of honor have been superseded by a community's instinct for self-preservation. But there's no romanticizing here: that instinct is all too soon overwhelmed. Thirty years later when Cecil, now a father himself and long since gone from the land, comes back for his father's funeral, the old ways have disappeared amid much larger feuds. His boyhood friend, the son of one of the watermen on the Bay that day, has come back from Vietnam "changed forever, and the catch is down and the oystermen go to war with the clam diggers and the seine haulers give up for good."

In the title story, Tilghman turns to another drama between father and son in an altogether different world on the banks of the Chesapeake. Dan Williams is the scion of Maryland gentry, who after his wife's early death brought up his son and daughter, now in their twenties, in the Georgian mansion that has been in the family for generations. The story is about a moment of disorientation, when the sense of rootedness and continuity he has trusted, even when it seemed oppressive, is undermined. One summer week when his children come to visit, Nick with a new girlfriend, Dan suddenly sees the most important bonds in his life coming loose. Rachel announces a job offer in a distant city and, appalling to Dan, Nick is in thrall to a loveless woman who is determined to poison his sense of his past. Just when it looks as though this humorless deconstructor of tradition (a disciple of Derrida, Nick's girlfriend is quite comically drawn) has the upper hand, a squall comes up over the water and a gust of the old family vigor returns as Nick and Rachel launch their sailboat for a wild ride, and Dan explodes in anger.

There's plenty of land in these stories, not just water and wind. And there is also fire, since Tilghman, though he knows the tug of transcendence, doesn't leave more lowly human passions out of the picture. In "Hole in the Day," Lonnie, the young mother of four, has fled her husband, her babies, and the oppressive plains where she keeps on having more babies. But as she reaches the mountains she's been heading for, she's pulled back by merciless domestic demands, which suddenly loom up around the thought of her chipped baby spoon, decorated with ducks whose beaks have long since faded:

> She has held that spoon for four babies, scooped in the first mouthfuls of pears and custard, given those four babies their first tastes of life on that spoon. Even now she can feel through the handle the cleaning tug of the baby's lips when he or she is hungry, and the resistance of the tongue that moves her hand aside when he's not. She's given her children everything on that spoon, and now she wants to hold it and look at those beakless ducks.

Almost without our noticing, the homely image has been transformed: the ducks on the spoon have become Lonnie's babies. In the ample vision of Tilghman's stories, small metamorphoses always matter. •



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You deserve a factual look at ...

The "Bashing" of Israel

Who does it? What is behind it?

The Administration, the media, and spokespersons of all kinds are increasingly careful not to offend any minority, ethnic community or lifestyle groups. But there is high season and ever-increasing volume and stridency in the "bashing" of Israel–in the print and broadcast media.

What are the facts?

■ Israel is a very small country, less than half the size of San Bernardino County, California. Its Jewish population is approximately 3.5 million, just about the population of Iowa. Compare that to the 22 Arab states, armed to the teeth, and virtually all of them in a state of war with Israel. They have over 140 million inhabitants and a land area larger than that of the United States. From its founding, Israel had to fight every day for its survival.

■ Israel is constantly being hectored and admonished by sanctimonious visitors, who lament Israel's "abuse" of its Arab population. Bishop Tutu made the false analogy between the condition of the blacks in South Africa and the status of Arabs in Israel. That is totally unfair.The blacks in South Africa are disenfranchised and politically impotent. The Arabs in Israel have the vote, have every civil right, are members of the Knesset(parliament), and members of Israel's diplomatic service. Nelson Mandela physically embraced that arch-terrorist Yassir Arafat and made the gratuitous statement that Zionism is a "unique form of colonialism". What a colossal lie! Zionism is the national liberation movement whose purpose has been for 2,000 years to restore Zion, the ancient land of Israel, to the Jewish people. One must marvel at the love affair of the South African black leadership with the Arabs. It is the Arabs who, even today, keep black slaves; it is the Arabs who continue to engage in genocide against blacks in such countries as Chad, the Sudan and Mauritania; it is the Arabs who for years have fueled apartheid by selling millions of barrels of oil to South Africa: It is the Arabs who by their extortionist pricing of oil have brought ruin and famine to many countries of black Africa.

■ Ex-president Carter, in his recent swing through the Middle East, visited Syria, but did not have one word of unfavorable comment about that aggressor country and its regime. How strange! It is a country whose record of executions, torture, imprisonment, and utter abuse of even the most fundamental human rights is almost unsurpassed. President Carter did not talk about any of that. He talked about "human rights violations" by the Israelis against the stone throwers and Molotov cocktails hurlers in the administered territories. He did not mention that it is only because of Israel's abiding respect for human rights that the "intifada" has been allowed to go on for so long. Any of the Arab rulers would have known how to handle such an uprising "efficiently" had it occurred in his own country.

■ Disconcertingly, our own Administration is beginning noticeably to "tilt" to the Arab cause. Israel is the *only* country in the Middle East where Western concepts of law, decency and human rights prevail. It is the only country that has free elections, a free press, unrestricted right of movement of its citizens and, of course, unlimited right of dissent. Besides, Israel is the staunchest ally of the United States—not just in the Middle East, but in the entire world. It is a priceless defensive asset of our country—where, in contrast to NATO or Japan/Korea, not a single American soldier needs to be stationed. How strange that our Adminstration would be so grimly fixed on imposing a PLO state on Israel and that it questions thelegitimacy of Israel's possession of Jerusalem. And how strange that the Administration would constantly wish to strong-arm Israel, oblivious to Israel's constant struggle for survival in a sea of implacable hostility, but at the same time remaining silent about the Arab tyrannies in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and all the others.

Why is so much Israel bashing going on? Why do such obviously decent people as our President, Secretary of State, former president Carter and so many columnists, commentators, pundits, television personalities and "liberals" of all stripes identify with the tyrannical Arab regimes, with governments that have terror, kidnapping, torture, attacks on innocent civilians and assaults on commercial aircraft as their official policy? And why do they oppose and criticize Israel, a country that started from scratch, little more than 40 years ago, and which, despite being under constant attack, has built a prosperous nation and a thriving society that surely could be a model for all developing countries? Could the sad answer be that it is a reincarnation of good old-fashioned anti-Semitism, which for almost twenty centuries has been the curse of Western society? No longer tolerated in its cruder manifestations, it now seems to be acceptably sublimated in the bashing of the state of Israel which, deep down inside, so many do not really wish to survive.

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CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

whose. But this one is entirely his.

MARK A. R. KLEIMAN
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Literary dissent

To the editors:

Irving Howe discusses in "Critic's Return" (April 30) an analysis I made in 1981 of Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River"—but has he actually read it? He doesn't qualify a brief quotation from it that was invoked by Malcolm Cowley in a misleading essay in 1984. "Lynn's notion of a 'sun-drenched fishing trip' is ridiculous, tone-deaf, too," Howe dismissively writes. But in fact my analysis asserts that the story is "a masterpiece of psychological indeterminacy," wherein keen feelings of pleasure and choked-off "dark thoughts" are intermingled.

Howe also creates a false impression of my rejoinder to Cowley, which he clearly did read. "In rebuttal," says Howe, "Lynn launched an odious personal attack on Cowley and his 'potato face.' " But the quoted words about Cowley's appearance are Hemingway's, not mine, and they sprang out of his lack of respect for Cowley's intelligence. "Think of poor old Cowley," he exclaimed in 1951, "who has staked out my whole life of which he knows practically fuck-all nothing." And in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" he had the dying writer recall a café in Paris, "and there . . . as he passed was that American poet with a pile of saucers in front of him and a stupid look on his potato face. . . ." In the published version of "Kilimanjaro," the poet's name is not given, but as I pointed out in my rejoinder, the typescript that is now in the library of the University of Texas identifies him as Malcolm Cowley. Howe's placement in my mouth of an extrapolated phrase from a Hemingway story is truly odious.

KENNETH S. LYNN
Washington, D.C.

Irving Howe replies:

In a 1984 polemic (in *The Georgia Review*) Kenneth Lynn referred to Malcolm Cowley's "potato face," giving as his source for that personal insult a text by Hemingway. Lynn dredged up the reference from a Hemingway manuscript in the University of Texas library. Now, if I were to publish an article saying that Tolstoy called Kenneth Lynn an XYZ after dredging this up from a Tolstoy manuscript in the University of Moscow, I would have to take responsibility for *repeating* the insult. That is what Lynn did, and the fact that the nastiness first came from Hemingway many years earlier did not make Lynn's remark any less odious. •

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Insincerity

THIS USED TO BE A DECENT CITY for moviegoing. Then blood-sucking developers devoured the Circle Theater, a revival house on Pennsylvania Avenue that once screened a different double feature every day. Soon the Biograph went semi-porno (though it still shows some good stuff at night). Aside from first-run movies at expanding prices on shrinking screens, this left only the American Film Institute at the Kennedy Center. Now, AFI ought to be one of the top film centers in the world, on par with London's National Film Theatre. It is our national film archive, and with a budget of $12 million, it isn't pinched for resources. But its calendar disappoints consistently. The schedule seems to specialize in pairings of the remotely esoteric with the laughably banal. A typical evening's offering will be Animation from the German Democratic Republic at 6:30, followed by *Smokey and the Bandit* at 9. Burt Reynolds is well represented. The idea seems to be that anyone who is enough of a film buff to go to AFI has already seen *Citizen Kane* and *The Godfather* enough times.

BUT EVERY SO OFTEN I'M LURED by one of the improbable offerings. The other evening's attraction was Werner Herzog's documentary *Shepherds of the Sun*, showing as part of the D.C. film festival. It is about a tribe of nomadic transvestites who roam the Southern Sahara. I kid you not. So strange was this film that I had to wonder whether Herzog hadn't fabricated the whole thing. The movie depicts the yearly ritual in which the lanky men of the Wodaabe tribe put on lurid cosmetics, jewelry, and women's clothes. Then commences a beauty contest that is judged by the women of the tribe. The men strike a series of poses, bugging eyes, flashing teeth, and rolling heads in a display reminiscent of the dance-club fashion of "vogueing." The women select the most beautiful men as mates for the night. There is apparently no homosexual dimension to this ritual. But it does prove that cross-dressing is 5,000 years old. I didn't stay for the second feature, *Semi-Tough*.

YOU HAD TO SYMPATHIZE WITH Solicitor General Kenneth Starr during oral argument in the flag-burning cases the Supreme Court heard last week. It was Starr's unenviable task to defend the anti-desecration statute passed by Congress last year, a law that clearly violates the First Amendment. The president and attorney general have argued that a constitutional ammendment is the only way around this "problem," and Starr has hinted in the past that he agrees with them. So it can't have been much fun for him to face a barrage of aggressive questions from Justices Scalia and Kennedy, all the while thinking, *these guys are right*. Given his predicament, the SG gave a pretty credible performance. His basic argument was that the state has a compelling interest in protecting the flag as a symbol, and that the law Congress passed to that end doesn't infringe upon the First Amendment because it prohibits flag-burning regardless of what message the incinerators want to convey. Of course, if you're not conveying any message but just getting rid of an old flag for hygienic reasons, burning is fine. Got it? This line of reasoning doesn't seem likely to convince the Court to reverse its 5-4 ruling in *Texas* v. *Johnson*, which held that flag-burning is symbolic speech and therefore protected. Justice Blackmun, whose vote is viewed as decisive, didn't tip his hand, but no one thinks there's anything about the two new cases that should change his mind. So barring an upset, here's what we can look forward to this summer: a renewed fight in Congress about a constitutional amendment to ban flag-burning. As I emerged from the Court, Joe Biden was already out on the steps, telling twenty-seven television cameras that he would introduce an amendment if the Court overturned his statute. Like Starr, Biden seemed insincere in what he was saying. At least I can't believe he thinks a constitutional amendment in a good idea. Starr has an excuse. His job is to argue for the government side even if he personally disagrees. Biden has none. He's just maneuvering to pre-empt Republicans who want to use the flag to whip the Democrats. Maybe Democrats can't win on this issue. But it would be a shame if they followed Biden and gave in without a fight.

TWO CABINET MEMBERS MADE major statements in recent weeks. The first was Richard Darman's Harvard address on "American Romanticism and the Global Economy." This was perhaps the most far-sighted, profound, and impassioned work by America's Budget Laureate since his "Cookie Monster" essay of several months ago. It had all the hallmarks of a Darman tour de force: metaphors, allusions, semi-colons—you name it. I'll try to summarize it in plain English as best I can. There were three sections, each with three titles. The first was called "Whither the American Romance: The Race Track and the Lorelei (or American's Decline and the End of History)." This was about how Darman likes the paintings by Albert Pinkham Ryder even though they're a little bit depressing. More people should be romantics like Ryder and take risks and make America great again. Stop writing defeatist, negative books like *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Fukuyama, Hegel. History ain't over yet. Japan isn't #1. We're still #1. The second section was called "The Struggle for 'Global Management': Of Growth and Greenery (or Neo-Luddites: Making the World Safe for Green Vegetables)." This part made fun of how everybody from George Bush to Jane Fonda is now an environmentalist. Being a pro-growth environmentalist is fine, but if you're just going to wave carrots at people and try to stop progress, forget it. The last part was called "Renewing the American Spirit: Beyond Alice's Restaurant (or Budgeting for a Superpower)." Darman says he sometimes whistles Arlo Guthrie songs on his way to work, that it's a bad sign, even though it's a pretty romantic thing to do in the White House corridor. It's time to stop whistling and lower the budget deficit. We need less regulation. We need that pioneering spirit back again. Let's all go to Mars. We should be realistic and romantic at the same time (paradox—another literary device). Darman has since grown his hair long but still won't talk about raising taxes. He seems to be taking half of his own advice.

THE OTHER BIG SPEECH WAS by Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, who talked about drugs. He called for the return of that mythic America "where 'pot' once again means a useful cooking utensil, where 'crack' is the sound of a baseball hitting a bat, where 'grass' is something to mow, not to smoke, and where 'heroin(e)' means a Helen Keller, a Christa McAuliffe, a Sandra Day O'Connor and, yes, a Barbara Bush." I too pine for those fabled days when words meant what they were supposed to mean. When "smack" was the sound your lips made when Mom pulled a cherry pie out of the oven. When "weed" was something that grew on your lawn next to the "grass." When "ice" was water frozen into cubes and used to chill drinks. When "joint" signified the place where two bones meet, when "hash" was something you ate with a poached egg on top, when "ecstasy" was the state of euphoria induced by the sight of, yes, Barbara Bush, when "corn" grew on stalks in the Midwest, and not in political rhetoric.

JACOB WEISBERG

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Asia Series

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In Bangkok, good things come in enormous packages.

There was a time in Thailand when pachyderms meant political power, and a white elephant was worth its weight in gold. While times have changed—elephants today are used to symbolize good luck instead of wealth—there are still a number of big surprises in store for the businessman in old Siam.

Mai pen rai.

Pronounced "my pen rye," this is translated as "it doesn't matter," and it conveys the Thai attitude toward business and life as well. It means it's best to avoid open conflicts and negotiate patiently —shouting will get you nowhere.

Shy Thais.

Thais seldom invite foreigners home—entertaining is done in restaurants. Use a private dining room at the Oriental Hotel (tel. 236-0400) for special occasions.

The how of the wai.

Instead of a handshake, try the Thai form of greeting, the *wai* (pronounced "why"). Bring your palms together, fingers up, and bow—it's most respectful.

Northwest notes.

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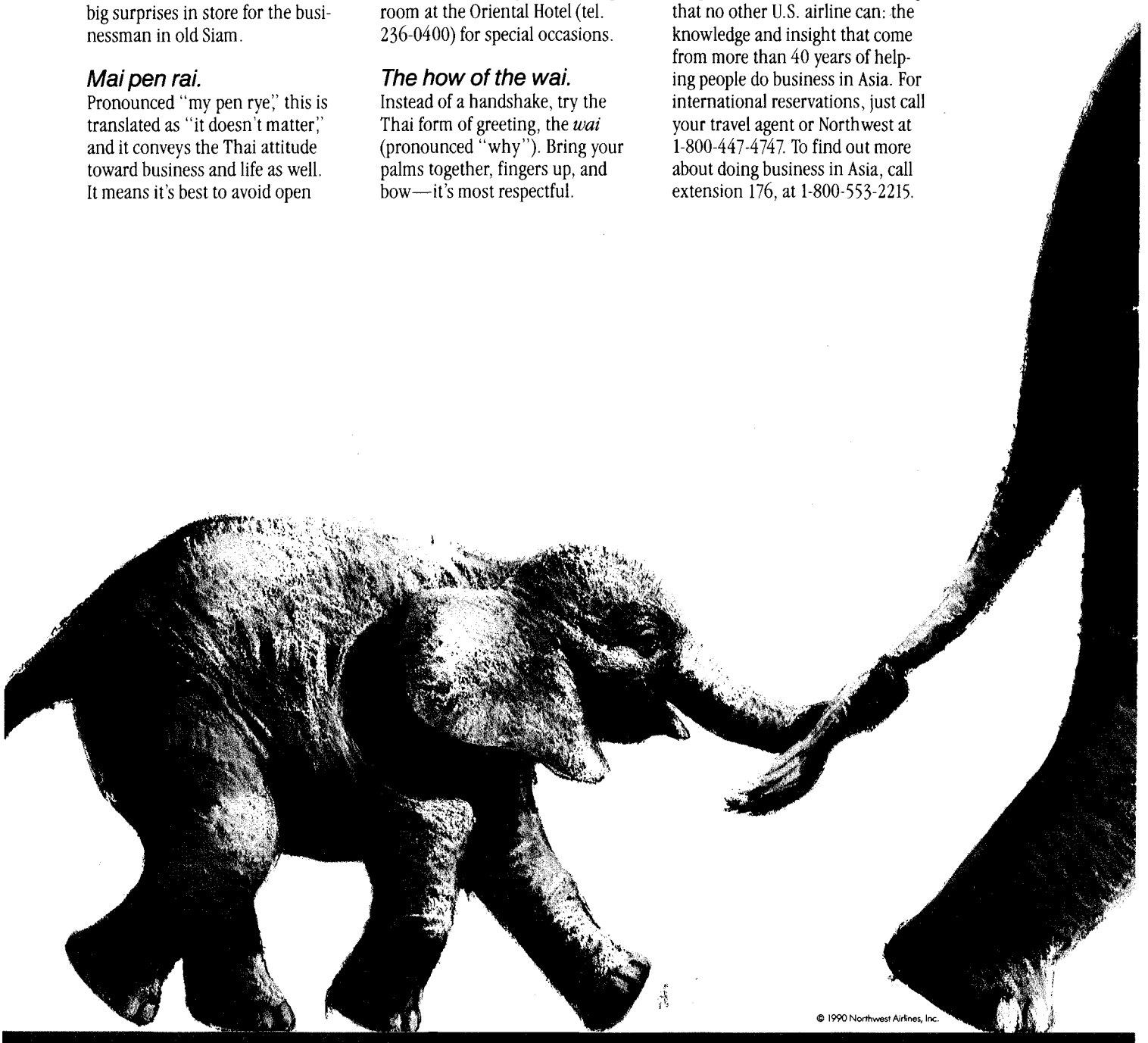

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